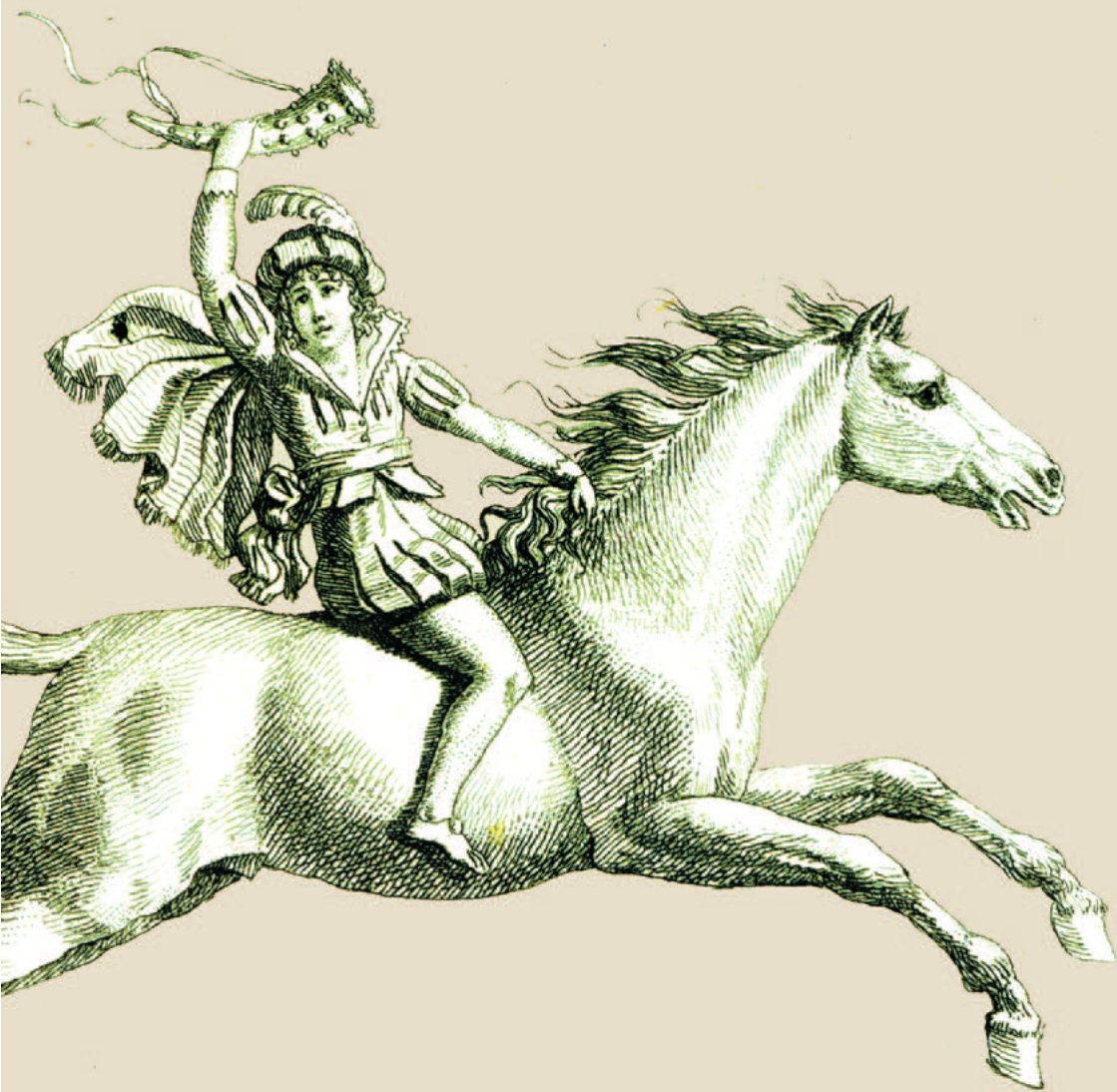


Editor: KARL FUGELSO



Studies in Medievalism XXIII

Ethics and Medievalism

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Ethics and Medievalism

Studies in Medievalism XXIII

2014

Studies in Medievalism

Founded by Leslie J. Workman

Previously published volumes are listed at the back of this book

Ethics and Medievalism

Edited by
Karl Fugelso



Studies in Medievalism XXIII 2014

Cambridge
D. S. Brewer

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First published 2014
D. S. Brewer, Cambridge

ISBN 978-1-84384-376-4

ISSN 0738-7164

D. S. Brewer is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DE, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc,
668 Mt Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620-2731, USA
website: www.boydellandbrewer.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

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This publication is printed on acid-free paper

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Studies in Medievalism is published by Boydell & Brewer, Ltd., P.O. Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK; Boydell & Brewer, Inc., 668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620-2731, USA. Orders and inquiries about back issues should be addressed to Boydell & Brewer at the appropriate office.

For a copy of the style sheet and for inquiries about **Studies in Medievalism**, please contact the editor, Karl Fugelso, at the Dept. of Art+Design, Art History, and Art Education, Towson University, 3103 Center for the Arts, 8000 York Rd, Towson, MD 21252-0001, USA, tel. 410-704-2805, fax 410-704-2810 ATTN: Fugelso, e-mail <kfugelso@towson.edu>. All submissions should be sent to him as e-mail attachments in Word.

Acknowledgments

The device on the title page comes from the title page of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte deutsche Lieder*, edited by L. Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano (Heidelberg and Frankfurt, 1806).

The epigraph is from an unpublished paper by Lord Acton, written about 1859 and printed in Herbert Butterfield, *Man on His Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 212.

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Two great principles divide the world, and contend for the master, antiquity and the middle ages. These are the two civilizations that have preceded us, the two elements of which ours is composed. All political as well as religious questions reduce themselves practically to this. This is the great dualism that runs through our society.

Lord Acton

Editorial Note

After two volumes on corporate medievalism, a direct discussion of ethics seemed in order. Such concerns have long formed a backdrop to the study of medievalism, particularly how the past has been manipulated for less than admirable ends, where the field should be positioned in relationship to other areas, especially medieval studies, and how scholars of medievalism can avoid conflicts of interest with the practice of medievalism. Recently, however, ethics have moved much closer to the fore, thanks to the global economic crisis and the proliferation of interest in marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ communities. Indeed, ethics were a major focus of the 27th Annual International Conference on Medievalism in 2012, and they are at least secondary concerns in such recent books as *The Disney Middle Ages: A Fairy Tale and Fantasy Past*, edited by Tison Pugh and Susan Aronstein, and Alicia C. Montoya's *Medievalist Enlightenment from Charles Perrault to Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

Particularly since these and other studies have confirmed that ethical considerations may take many forms, I sent my call for papers to an extraordinarily great number and range of venues this year. Moreover, I left it purposely vague, as I invited essays "discussing ethics in medievalism" and asked: "What role do ethics play in post-medieval responses to the Middle Ages? In interpretations of those responses? How is moral behavior portrayed (or not)? How is the audience treated? Who is the audience?"

These tactics led to far more submissions than we ordinarily receive, including some from India, Nigeria, and other regions from which we usually do not hear. They represent an exceptional diversity of subjects and viewpoints. Those featured here form an extraordinarily fertile and wide-ranging discussion.

Many of the issues in this discussion are staked out by the first paper in our essay section, M. J. Toswell's "The Dangers of the Search for Authenticity?: The Ethics of Hallowe'en," as she uses a favorite American, Canadian, and now British holiday to address how some medieval customs and ideas have been repackaged and even reinvented for twenty-first-century entertainment. In "Living Memory and the Long Dead: The Ethics of Laughing at the Middle Ages," Louise D'Arcens then reflects on comedy in films about the Middle Ages to ask at what point the production and enjoyment of caricaturization of that period becomes inappropriate. In "Justice Human and Divine: Ethics in Margaret Frazer's Medievalist Dame Frevisse Series,"

Lisa Hicks and Lesley E. Jacobs concentrate on a particular series of detective novels while questioning the ethics behind post-medieval attempts to represent the Middle Ages and behind the pleasure we derive from sordid stories about them. In “The Song Remains the Same: Crossing Intersections to Create an Ethical World via an Adaptation of *Everyman* for Everyone,” Carol L. Robinson, Daniel-Raymond Nadon, and Nancy M. Resh build on their production of a twenty-first-century medievalist work as they compare modern and medieval treatment of disadvantaged communities, in this case those that revolve around D/deaf culture. In “Bringing Elsewhere Home: *A Song of Ice and Fire*’s Ethics of Disability,” Lauryn S. Mayer and Pascal J. Massie address how that and other forms of disability are treated in George R. R. Martin’s highly popular medievalist novels. And in “The Ethical Movement of Daenerys Targaryen,” Christopher Roman focuses on a particular character in Martin’s series to examine the problem of power within the tensions between political action and ethics.

These direct discussions of ethics via examples from medievalist film, novels, theater, and rituals shed new light on related issues in our full-length articles, which also address ethical concerns but usually do so in the course of concentrating on other matters. In “What if the Giants Returned to Albion for Vengeance?: Crusade and the Mythic Other in the *Knights of the Nine* Expansion to *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*,” Jason Pitruzzello looks at capitalistic motives for melding two superficially incompatible narratives. In “The Dark Ages of the Mind: Eugenics, Amnesia, and Historiography in Dan Brown’s *Inferno*,” Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly argue that Brown uses the “Dark Ages,” specifically Dante’s *Inferno*, to promote what the Moberlys call a “positivist, transhumanist agenda.” In “Plastic Pagans: Viking Human Sacrifice in Film and Television,” Harry Brown analyzes the motives for disjunctures between, on the one hand, medieval texts that describe human sacrifices and, on the other hand, medievalist film and television that portray such rituals. In “Meat Puzzles: *Beowulf* and Horror Film,” Nickolas Haydock looks at related issues of how horror films have sometimes echoed *Beowulf*, and how *Beowulf* films have often invoked horror movies. In “Words, Swords, and Truth: Competing Visions of Heroism in *Beowulf* on Screen,” Mary R. Bowman makes reference to the world around us as she examines the many attitudes toward war in *Beowulf* films. In “Socialism and Translation: The Folks of William Morris’s *Beowulf*,” Michael R. Kightley makes the case that Morris’s translation is wrapped around his support for socialism. In “We Wol Sleen this False Traytor Deeth’: The Search for Immortality in Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale and J. K. Rowling’s *The Deathly Hallows*,” Alison Gulley brings up the challenges of determining whether a reference is intentional or accidental, as she suggests a medieval source for the approach to death in the Harry Potter novels. And in “Intention or Accident? Charles Alfred

Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*," Phillip Lindley investigates whether Stothard's prints were deliberately manipulated in the interests of nationalistic and religious bigotry.

Of course, focusing on a theme such as ethics can easily turn in on itself, as it invites debate about the ethics of focusing on ethics and on how that study is conducted. But I hope this volume will spur discussion far beyond that. Indeed, I hope it is the beginning of a much greater effort to foreground the choices medievalists make, what those choices reflect about their makers, and how they, and analysis of them, may affect others. As many authors in this volume underscore, medievalists – and the scholars who study them – may have a significant influence on the world beyond them, and it is incumbent on us to discern and appreciate that impact.

The Dangers of the Search for Authenticity? The Ethics of Hallowe'en

M. J. Toswell

In the last twenty years Hallowe'en has become a major festival in the North American annual calendar, easily outstripping Easter and even the Fourth of July in retail sales and the popular imagination. It involves a lot of masquerading, even more candy and treats, and a joining together of communities.¹ At its core remains a profound fear of death, a recognition that the world is a difficult entity to understand, an acknowledgment that humanity cannot fully comprehend its place in the universe. These are philosophical and ethical questions, and they reflect the paradox at the core of the Hallowe'en festivities: it is a very ancient festival whose purpose is to turn away supernatural or ghostly entities, to re-establish a comprehensible world order. Modern celebrations of this festival search for authenticity in this regard, calling upon tradition and custom to justify some of the excess that pervades the contemporary festival. This effort raises intriguing, possibly difficult, ethical questions for medievalists. Some of the elements of Hallowe'en that are designated as traditional and generally thought to be ancient (in the sense of dating back to the Middle Ages) are misunderstandings of the medieval world, and others call up modes and manners of being that are perhaps best left unrecovered. Three of these elements, chosen more or less at random, are the use of bonfires in videogames, the new science or sport of hurling pumpkins, and the notion of the witch, the female figure at the center of

¹ For the modern structure of Hallowe'en and an analysis of its cultural work in America, see David J. Skal, *Death Makes a Holiday: A Cultural History of Halloween* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002); a more international perspective, which nonetheless ends at Hollywood, is Nicholas Rogers, *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

modern celebrations. Taken together, these elements may suggest some of the ethical difficulties inherent in the modern construction of Hallowe'en.

In retail terms, Hallowe'en falls second only to Christmas these days, with children choosing their costumes, adults preparing them and getting ready for the onslaught at the door and in the many private Hallowe'en parties, and everyone else in society having at the very least an opinion about the rise of the spooky and the monstrous in modern society. All Hallows Eve, with Hallowmas or All Saints' Day, and for Catholics and some others the ensuing All Souls' Day on 2 November: these are early medieval feasts in conception, originally serving the syncretism of the evangelizing church in overlapping Samhain. All Saints' Day moved from 13 May informally to 1 November in the seventh century, and was firmly placed there by Louis the Pious in 845 at the behest of Pope Gregory IV. All Souls' Day, with its connection to the rise of purgatory, appears to have had its early appearances in the ninth century, caught on at Cluny in the eleventh century, and became official dogma in 1274. One might argue that the basic elements of the event that is Hallowe'en have been in place since the early medieval period: the onrushing dark of winter held at bay with fire; the harvest festival with the plenteous produce of late fall; and the sense of a time outside of time, where the veil between present and future, now and then, here and elsewhere, runs thin. The response to these factors even has its similarities, as putting out food for the restless spirits has become providing wagonloads of candy to the restless souls of the modern day, and the donning of costumes in order to evade the attention of the spirits or the restless dead has become the elaboration of costumes that reflect our deepest fears and our most secret desires – in other words, pretty much the same thing. Moreover, the modern Hallowe'en reaches for authenticity, for a veritably medieval experience.

The hoopla surrounding Hallowe'en today includes a strange re-medievalization, an attempt to recreate the medieval in the early years of the twenty-first century – whether intentionally or not. Intensive historical research lies behind a lot of modern videogames, research that gives them a remarkable depth of verisimilitude and a genuinely impressive sense of immediacy. At the same time, they reify a sense that people in the Middle Ages all lived that “nasty, brutish, and short” life described by Hobbes – which is convenient for videogames, which need a lot of characters to kill or maim or obliterate. The creators of the videogames fill in their story arcs with details that derive largely out of a tradition of medievalism. They work out the primary quest or narrative plan, or a dozen or more interlinked story arcs, utilizing elements that seem appropriate to them – many of them from other medievalist texts but some from actual research into the Middle Ages. Moreover, they start from the central concept of Hallowe'en, that the veil between the living and the dead can run thin, and that the dead constitute voracious souls wanting

to absorb the living. The notion of an eternal conflict between living souls and dead spirits offers the creators of videogames rich terrain for developing complex scenarios of warfare, infiltration, genocide, and destruction. They also use other elements of Hallowe'en, including the idea of costumes and masquerading with avatars for each participant, and the joyful fear that inheres in every engagement with the other. And, they pick up from the bonfires of Samhain to chase away the dark, as elaborated by the British development of Bonfire Night as a dark homage to Guy Fawkes.² Bonfires, a devouring light in the dark of night, offer warmth and comfort but also sacrifice and a turn to a new mode of life. Thus, to take a random example, *Dark Souls* and the soon-to-be-released *Dark Souls II* use a bonfire as the rest point or checkpoint. Stopping at the "Bonfire" allows the player in the role-playing game to heal and rest up, but it costs the player souls. These elements appear to have genuine Samhain or Hallowmas connections, offering protection against the encroaching dark and the invading souls of the dead. That is, this modern videogame reaches for an "authentic" Samhain experience with fires lit to chase off the dark souls, to mark the veil between life and death, to give the player an opportunity, albeit a difficult one fraught with tricky choices and challenges, for redemption.³

A second example of this redesigned "real" medievalism is punkin chunkin, a competitive event at the end of October and beginning of November every year, the term a contracted form of "pumpkin chucking." The event seems relatively harmless, although it makes use of profoundly medieval methods for tossing pumpkins longer and higher than might seem reasonable. Tossing or throwing pumpkins, with a modern version of a trebuchet, does not give rise to obvious ethical concerns, but it does suggest a modern concern with expanding the remit of Hallowe'en and harvest festivals back into a medieval mode. At the core of the matter is the question of the authentic, the real. Punkin chunkin is a new event in North American life.⁴ There are some references to it about forty years ago, but settled competitions appear to

² See Lisa Morton, *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 24–27.

³ *Dark Souls* is a video game made for PS3 and Xbox, generally available and relatively highly praised by the reviewers: <<http://www.gamespot.com/dark-souls/>>, accessed 30 November 2013. A successor to an earlier game entitled *Demon's Souls*, released in 2009, it was released on 3 October 2011. *Dark Souls II*, its even darker and more difficult successor, has a large web presence in advance of its release date on 11 March 2014. It promises the same degree of difficulty, and looks to be available on a wider variety of platforms: <<http://www.darksoulsii.com/>>, accessed 30 November 2013.

⁴ See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pumpkin_chunking>, accessed 30 November 2013. The largest of these events seems to be in Delaware, with its own website: <<http://www.punkinchunkin.com/>>, accessed 30 November 2013.

have gotten seriously under way about twenty years ago, with the variety of categories in which one can throw pumpkins becoming fully established in the last decade. Nowadays there are nearly ten different categories in the competition, ranging from slingshot and human throwing (with the pumpkin as a rather large discus, perhaps) to the more expected mechanical throwing machines, including the trebuchet, the catapult, and the cannon.

Punkin chunkin does not have obvious medievalist roots, and indeed pumpkins are wholly a New World feature of the holiday. Recent histories of Hallowe'en trace pumpkin carving back to the carving of turnip lanterns or of beets (mangel-wurzels); the latter appears in some English towns with reference to Punkie Night and the former in Scotland and Ireland.⁵ A few bits of doggerel support the existence of such vegetative lanterns in the British Isles, referring to "neeps" or turnips as frightening off the witch and warlock when made into lanterns, but this very reference makes it likely that this tradition was post-medieval, since witches and warlocks, never terribly frightening in the British Isles, certainly did not merit this kind of attention before the Renaissance. In any case, the tradition of pumpkin carving, technically a much easier job than chopping a hole for a candle in a turnip or a beet, is a North American development. It folds seamlessly into the harvest festival elements of Hallowe'en, as well as offering itself for the recent spate of "great pumpkin" competitions weighing giant versions, and carving competitions judging the best artistic and scary faces produced by various implements. The punkin chunkin competitions, unlike these other modes of vying for squashistic excellence, do involve a kind of casting back to an earlier time in their use of single- or double-armed throwing implements, and even slingshots or techniques reminiscent of Olympic shot-put and hammer-throwing competitions. Punkin chunkin invokes nostalgia, in a somewhat inchoate way involving Greek, Roman, and medieval modes of throwing.

This nostalgic interest in throwing smallish round objects a great distance has one relatively obvious medievalist link. In *The Return of the King*, the third volume of J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the great city of Gondor finds itself besieged by Mordor, and specifically by the Lord of the Nâzgul, the chief of the ringwraiths. During the siege, the great catapults throw missiles so high and so far that they fall in the first ring of the seven rings of the city, and some even burst into flame on impact. The use of siege

⁵ A spate of books about Hallowe'en began to appear about ten years ago, and websites also provide a lot of material today. Pumpkins are frequently discussed; see Lisa Morton, *The Halloween Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), *s.v.* Pumpkins, Punkie night, Turnips. Hurling heads and pumpkins is of course also a feature of Washington Irving's "Legend of the Sleepy Hollow," from 1819; see also Skal, *Death Makes a Holiday*, 35–53 *passim*.

engines that throw missiles, including the Greek fire, which would burst into unquenchable flame on impact (and whose secret was lost with the fall of Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire), certainly evokes a medieval world of castles and warfare. But the missiles cast into Gondor include some that are psychological warfare intended to demoralize and distress the citizens, the last of the Númenoreans:

Then among the greater casts there fell another hail, less ruinous but more horrible. All about the streets and lanes behind the Gate it tumbled down, small round shot that did not burn. But when men ran to learn what it might be, they cried aloud or wept. For the enemy was flinging into the City all the heads of those who had fallen fighting at Osgiliath, or on the Rammas, or in the fields. They were grim to look on; for though some were crushed and shapeless, and some had been cruelly hewn, yet many had features that could be told, and it seemed that they had died in pain; and all were branded with the foul token of the Lidless Eye. But marred and dishonoured as they were, it often chanced that thus a man would see again the face of someone that he had known, who had walked proudly once in arms, or tilled the fields, or ridden in upon a holiday from the green vales in the hills.⁶

It seems a long way from using a catapult or trebuchet to fling pumpkins as far as possible across a field to a piece of malicious battlefield behavior in a novel, and it could well be that the link is uncertain, contrived. However, in the ten years since the Peter Jackson films of the *Lord of the Rings* started to appear, the idea of tossing pumpkins has hugely increased in popularity. Part of the joy of the event does seem to be a squealing glee as the pumpkins explode into mush and pieces of squashed squash. There is an element of free violence, without repercussions, to the whole enterprise. And there is certainly a medieval element, though perhaps more of a medievalist element to pumpkin hurling. Certainly, the *Lord of the Rings* movies use catapults and trebuchets and other massive medievalizing machines to lay siege to Helm's Deep and to Gondor. Moreover, the videogames spawned from those sieges emphasize the siege techniques and the methods of defence. They also include the Antipodean bad joke about throwing dwarves. Throwing things, always a human urge, has now become something that can be done with machines made in the backyard or the garage, thereby allowing every North American an opportunity to compete, to achieve the goal of flinging

⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, Part 3 of *The Lord of the Rings* (London: The Folio Society, 1977), 98–99.

the pumpkin farther than anyone else. Hurling pumpkins is great fun, but it does recall siege engines and attacking castles, and winning through. The greatest pumpkin chucker is a medieval hero, of sorts.

Lastly, the witch. Witches are a staple of modern Hallowe'en events. The lore of the witch is extensive, now involving black cats as familiars, brooms to ride on in the direction of the moon, spells and curses, and an extensive modern history. For the last fifteen years, doorsteps the world over have been crowded with versions of Ron, Hermione, and Harry, and their antagonists, Draco, Voldemort, and Fenrir Greyback the werewolf. Along with their petition for candy is a petition for acceptance of the Other, the different. They seem not just lovely role models for children, but powerful images of possibility, of the magic inherent in human existence. But they also open up the issue of the witch in modern society as a figure to be further examined and explored, and with darker implications. Thus, the *lamia* in television dramas such as *Lost Girl*, the domestic witch who suddenly behaves like a *striga*, the entire witching world of J. K. Rowling in which women are teachers, secretaries, somewhat ditzzy prophets or visionaries, second-in-command figures, and especially housewives: these figures reify gender categories and do so with the apparent justification that "that's how it was back then in this medieval world." Although none of these texts suggests a medieval origin for the strident and evil female characters, there does seem to be an underlying sense that this is sort of logical as a construction of women because it is how they once behaved. (This, of course, leaves aside the minor detail that most of the witches mentioned in extant medieval texts were male.) More importantly, it reconnects ideas about gender that many feminists have fought to disconnect: that women are dangerous or have the kind of weakness that makes them open to encroachment by evil, that women require male supervision and oversight, that women are untrustworthy and potentially monstrous.

For example, consider J. K. Rowling's invented construction of the modern world as a massive binary opposition between Muggles and witches or wizards, and the even stronger binary opposition inside the wizarding world between good and evil. Central to the secret wizarding world is Hogwarts, a castle complete with turrets, staircases, dungeons, secret passages and entrances, exotic and expensive artworks, a large library, and a full complement of exotic individuals.⁷ The students at the castle, the novices being initiated into the mysteries of their elite status, are all witches. They demonstrate great

⁷ The sequence as published in Canada is J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2000), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2000), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2000), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2003),

power, they learn a great deal, and steadily they hone their skills through the seven novels of the series. Fundamentally, they domesticate the notion of the witch, establishing a quotidian acceptance of their rather extraordinary powers and agilities. Moreover, the striking figures in the novels, the memorable ones, are largely male. Hermione Granger serves as a role model for many young women, and in the earlier novels her cleverness and learning are critical, but she fades in importance as it becomes clear that her intended romantic partner is Ron Weasley and not Harry Potter. In other words, although she is a remarkable young witch, as many tell her, once she looks likely to achieve a partner, she fades from notice. Nor does Ginny Weasley, a cipher in the earlier novels though central to the plot of one of them as she is taken over by the spirit of the young Voldemort, ever quite achieve prominence as an individual. The individuals at the core of the novel are Harry Potter himself, Voldemort, some of the teachers at Hogwarts including the headmaster Albus Dumbledore, the Potions master (for most of the novels) Severus Snape, and Sirius Black, an exuberant and conflicted character lost midway through the story arc. These characters, the engines that run the tales, are all male. They become wizards, the main figures of the wizarding world. Their female counterparts, although they have a few moments in the spotlight, are slighter and less striking figures. The result has been that a stereotype has been altered, but in part also reified. The witches at our door are reborn with new powers, but the men are the serious contenders in the Wizarding Tournament, and in the long struggle against Voldemort. By the end, witches are normalized to a stereotyped family group: Harry and Ginny see off their two eldest children, both boys, on their way to Hogwarts, while their youngest, a girl, waits her turn two years hence.⁸ Young Lily, waiting at the gate, seems rather typical of the female witch.

The issue at the heart of the fun and fabulousness of the modern celebration of Hallowe'en is a dark one. Where the Christmas holiday has largely been disassociated in the popular imagination from its origins, and even where it has not, Christmas remains a joyous celebration of a birth, of new life. Hallowe'en retains a dark side. The urge to dress as a witch or a warlock, as a zombie or a warrior, is a nostalgic urge calling back to an earlier and apparently simpler time. But many costume choices also serve an apotropaic purpose, chasing away the dark souls, the ghosts, the zombies, the witches, the evil lords. Pumpkin chunkin is a fun and festive harvest and Hallowe'en event, but the ejection of missiles to fly far and high through the air also has its dark side. And the question remains: how much information about

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2005), and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Vancouver: Raincoast Press, 2007).

⁸ Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 602–7.

the Middle Ages should be widely available in modern culture? Perhaps a personal anecdote will make this point: some years ago I started going into a Grade 4 classroom to answer questions about the medieval period, when a segment on the Middle Ages was adopted into the Ontario classroom. My practice was to do a short presentation on one aspect of the Middle Ages, about ten minutes or so, and then to answer the students' questions. Most of the questions were pretty easy: my favorite castle or king, what they ate, how armor was structured, how they could tell time, and so forth. But the very first class had a cadre of students who wanted to know about dungeons, about how to kill people during sieges, and about torture. Naturally, I turned to the teacher for a decision, especially on the latter. The edict was for one method, preferably a simple one, to be mentioned quickly. Which is what I did. But the incident was a reminder that human nature does not just find positive images and ideas intriguing; it has to explore the dark and the dangerous as well – and children do this routinely.⁹

The ethical question, therefore, is whether scholars of medievalism should explain the details of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "The Hammer of Witches" and its construction of women as inherently dangerous, weak, and susceptible to the blandishments of the devil. The simple answer is that this is not necessary because the *Malleus*, written in 1486 by two Dominicans, was implemented mostly in particular areas of continental Europe and in a time period that falls in the Renaissance or Early Modern period, not the medieval. And the simpler answer is that the *Malleus* has been discovered, perhaps even over-discovered, because it so perfectly reflects the attitudes to women so rightly deplored in the realm of feminist research.¹⁰ But the more difficult answer, and perhaps the truer one, is that the *Malleus* was indeed a symptom, a reflection of attitudes to women that developed slowly over time in the Middle Ages, influenced by Christian doctrine, and by both Christian and Muslim cultural practice. That these attitudes are indeed ancient and medieval in origin, though imperfectly developed during the Middle Ages, means that a simple answer is insufficient. And thus, the modern re-medievalizing of Hallowe'en opens up a variety of ethical considerations for medievalists, and indeed for society in general.¹¹

⁹ The school in question was A. G. Duffield School in Lambeth, Ontario, just outside London, Ontario. The excellent teacher who rescued me was Anita Rasmussen, and the colleague through whom I was invited for these thoroughly enjoyable sessions was Deborah Oates.

¹⁰ A good starting-point for the massive field that is the study of the *Malleus* is <<http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/>>, accessed 5 December 2013.

¹¹ These ethical issues about what we know of the Middle Ages, and what we think we know, are addressed elegantly in a series of thirty short papers found in *Misconceptions About the Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby (New York: Routledge; Taylor

One might almost argue that the nostalgic search for the medieval in modern Hallowe'en encourages a rather crude and teleological simplification about how humanity has progressed. Moreover, in some respects it reifies and re-establishes social mores that might otherwise be disappearing. Under the guise of being historically accurate, deeply conservative ideas about human behavior can justify themselves as a pretense, a recreation of earlier times. In other words, recreating a "true medieval" experience, as these texts attempt, is a highly dubious ethical endeavor.

Living Memory and the Long Dead: The Ethics of Laughing at the Middle Ages

Louise D'Arcens

Is there an ethics particular to laughing at the Middle Ages? What are the stakes of making the medieval past an object of postmedieval humor, and can the long dead of the Middle Ages laugh back at modernity?

A focus on the ethics of humor as an instrument of social tolerance or exclusion has gained momentum over the past two decades, with an increased analysis of how globalization and multiculturalism have brought different ethnic, cultural, and religious communities into daily proximity with one another.¹ Because of the emergence of bigoted humor out of ideologies of ethnic hatred, misogyny, and homophobia, and because of what humor theorist Ken Willis calls its “consequences [...] within living memory,”² laughter is regarded as a practice with direct and often urgent ramifications for the present and the future. The scholarly location of humor in the domains of the present and the social appeals to the ethical injunction against ridiculing the experience of others and the commitment to the social inclusion of persecuted peoples. In their attempts to identify the line between humor and offense, humor scholars have been concerned with the social dynamics between the subject (or “teller”) of the comic text, its object, and its audience, as well as with assessing the aptness of the so-called “superiority” and “relief” theories, in which humor either has the effect of establishing

¹ See for instance, Sharon Lockyer and Michael Pickering, ed., *Beyond a Joke: The Limits of Humor* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Toward a Social Critique of Humour* (London: Sage, 2005); Elliott Oring, *Jokes and their Relations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

² Ken Willis, “Merry Hell: Humour Competence and Social Incompetence,” in *Beyond a Joke*, ed. Lockyer and Pickering, 129.

the laughing group's superiority over the laughed-at group via ridicule, or conversely, performs the more benign function of diffusing social tension by channeling and hence warding off fear of the laughed-at group.³ Whether laughter is perceived, then, as what Terrence Des Pres has described as a tonal transgression that offers an obliquely satiric avenue into understanding intolerance,⁴ or, conversely, as what Gerald Peary sees as a cavalier trivialization of the suffering of others,⁵ there is a shared assumption that the exercise of humor is an ethical behavior that can either foster or undermine progress toward a socially inclusive world.

But because this scholarship addresses itself to analyzing the role of humor in establishing relationships, and especially hierarchies, between contemporaneous or cohabiting groups, the theorizing of historicist humor – laughing at the past as “other” to the modern, rather than as part of “living memory” – is virtually absent from the scholarship. Not even the widely held belief that humor is a vehicle for the perpetuation or undermining of axiomatic social values which, as Lockyer and Pickering argue, “trail a legacy of meanings and associations that extend a good way back into the past,”⁶ has led to the analysis of the social values implicit within comic representations of the past, despite the significance of these representations to reinforcing or challenging a whole range of ideological truisms. Recently, a single book has appeared on this topic, Hannu Salmi's helpful *Historical Comedy on Screen* (2011). Although it has emerged from film studies, it extends the theoretical ambit of humor scholarship via its exploration of how “the register of comedic narration provides alternative ways of perceiving the past and of shaping [...] spectators' relationship with history.”⁷ Some medievalist cinema features in Marcia Landy's contribution to this volume – almost inevitably, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, but also Mario Monicelli's two *Brancaleone* films, which I will also go on to discuss – but these are not analyzed *qua* the specific question of comic perceptions of the Middle Ages, but under the more general rubric of comic historicism. This brief essay, then, will begin to address this oversight. Using Monicelli's medievalist comedies as my example, I will explore the complex dynamics of what it means to laugh specifically at the medieval past. I will show that although representations

³ Christie Davies, *Jokes and their Relations to Society* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998); John Morreall, *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humour* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁴ Terrence Des Pres, “Holocaust Laughter,” in *Writing into the World: Essays 1973–1987* (New York: Viking, 1991), 77–86 (86).

⁵ Gerald Peary, “No Laughing Matter,” *Boston Phoenix*, Arts Section, 30 October 1998, 9.

⁶ *Beyond a Joke*, 8.

⁷ Hannu Salmi, *Historical Comedy on Screen* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2011), 29.

of the Middle Ages in comic texts are shaped primarily by the ambition to amuse audiences, this ambition is granted particular license by the distance between the medieval past and the present, and the long, diverse (and hence liberating) tradition of interpretation that has developed in the intervening centuries. Nevertheless, while this might encourage the impression that comic reworkings of medieval history are fundamentally “low stakes,” in fact the ethical stakes of comic historical interpretation for the present can still be both immediate and high.

Monicelli's *L'armata Brancaleone* (Brancaleone's Army, 1966) and its sequel *Brancaleone alla Crociate* (Brancaleone at the Crusades, 1970) are a pair of films deserving of more scholarly attention from medievalists than they have so far received. As the two major historical films in the *commedia all'italiana* cinematic movement of the 1960s and 1970s that Monicelli was instrumental in shaping, the *Brancaleone* films are picaresque tales that trace the outlandish exploits of an impoverished knight-errant, Brancaleone di Norcia (played in declamatory mock-heroic mode by Vittorio Gassman), and his small, scruffy “army” of misfits, which includes in the first film various brigands and vagrants, an orphan boy, a tiny wizened Jew, and a Byzantine bastard son, and in the second film a blind man, a cripple, a dwarf, a leper (later revealed to be a fugitive princess), a masochistic penitent, a baby, and a witch. Under Brancaleone's blustering, chaotic leadership they embark on a range of adventures that includes falsely (and unsuccessfully) claiming a patrimony bequeathed in a stolen document, following a religious zealot, unsuccessfully attempting to collect ransom for a sham hostage, visiting hermits and stylites, settling the quarrel between Pope Gregory VII and Clement III, going to the Holy Land, and getting into shambolic fights along the way. Together these elements present a risible Middle Ages, characterized by irrational piety, religious intolerance, buffoonish heroics, and barbarity.

Lest this seem like simple ridicule, the tenor of the films' comic medievalism is more complex. Lorenzo Codelli notes that among Monicelli's primary influences were literary texts, in particular Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. This inheritance is not just evident in the films' comically debased, picaresque version of a knight-errant narrative, although it is impossible to watch Brancaleone's constant falls, buffets, and gaffes, or view his piecemeal armor, without thinking of Don Quixote in his rusty ensemble and paste-board travesty of a helmet. Rather, what is most intangibly but strikingly Cervantean about Monicelli's films is their satiric-parodic register, which modulates in a similarly nuanced way Cervantes' novel between laughing *at* and laughing *with* the Middle Ages, and between ridicule and sympathy for their hero, who, as a pitch-perfect burlesque of the romance hero, moves the audience to derision, amusement, and tenderness in equal measures. Moreover, Moni-

celli's narrative, while robustly executed, has a finely calibrated emotional structure: just when Brancaleone's stentorian pronouncements on chivalrous conduct threaten to become too absurd, or his exposure of his companions to danger reveals chivalry's violent and delusional underbelly, he either scores a victory or extends kindness to a vulnerable outcast, which restores his innate nobility ... until the next mishap.

The film also offers a deeply sympathetic portrayal of a cast of misfits, and as such has attracted praise for its presentation of "history from the point of view of the humble people, the little guy."⁸ Although larger historical events find their way into the films – the Crusades and papal rivalry are two conspicuous ones – their significance plays out on the minor stage of the characters' smaller lives. Codelli, and Marcia Landy and Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri after him, have identified this tendency as a counter-historical strategy in Monicelli's work.⁹ What this reveals – and here the ethical stakes of his historical representations become apparent – is that the satiric target of the *Brancaleone* films is not the Middle Ages per se, but first and foremost what Monicelli saw as the apologistic way in which the medieval period has been depicted in contemporary culture and the purposes such depictions have served. He nominated the immaculate look of the Hollywood Middle Ages as his first *bête noire*; the apparently haphazard structure of the *Brancaleone* films, as well as their earthy palette and the realism of their hot and dusty mise-en-scènes, are a clear riposte to the Technicolor Middle Ages of Michael Curtiz and William Keighley's 1938 *The Adventures of Robin Hood* and its ilk. But Monicelli's critique also extends beyond cinema, taking aim at what he saw as Italian academics' airbrushed, "glossy vision" (*visione patinata*) of the medieval period as refined and highly civilized. Rejecting the self-congratulatory nationalistic, ethnocentric, and Christocentric implications of this vision, he replaces it with an Italian Middle Ages that is hierarchical, barbaric, and xenophobic (internally and externally):

The Middle Age was the low point in European history. [...] Civilization, truth, and science were on the other side: the side of Islam. That's what the Crusades were all about. We went to occupy places where they were more civilized. Of course, we were repulsed. I wanted to

⁸ Deborah Young, "Poverty, Misery, War and Other Comic Material: An Interview with Mario Monicelli," *Cinéaste* 29 (2004): 36–40 (38).

⁹ Lorenzo Codelli, "Mario Monicelli: 1915–2010," *Positif* 600 (2011): 56–57 (56); Landy, "Comedy and Counter-History," in *Historical Comedy on Screen*, 177–98 (177). Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri characterizes Monicelli's representation as that of "un medioevo degli emarginati, dei poveri, dei cavalieri ridicoli." See *Medioevo militante: La politica di oggi alle prese con barbari e crociati* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011), 131.

show this was the real Middle Ages in Italy – barbaric and uncivilized, savage, grotesque.¹⁰

Interestingly, Monicelli's comically grotesque vision led to him being invited to debate with professors in Italian university fora. His self-defence in these contexts offers an intriguing snapshot into the ethical complexity of comic medievalism's negotiation of history, politics, and humor. First, he argued that the Middle Ages of his *Brancaleone* films was, for all its buffoonery, "completely true"; second, he claimed its satirical dimension reflected his socialist convictions, in particular his critique of hegemonic and authoritarian structures both past and present; and thirdly, he introduced comedy as a defence of the film's "exaggerations," arguing that the "funny, comic film," he wanted to make would not be possible with a decorous Middle Ages.¹¹ The realist impulse underpinning Monicelli's comic position is evident in his use of framing techniques characteristic of Italian neo-realism, in which middle-distance shots embed bodies in their environments, creating a *mise-en-scène* that encompasses the characters' life-world. Using a historical realist technique also evident in Roberto Rossellini's 1950 depiction of the medieval Franciscans in *Francesco, giullare di Dio*, Monicelli frequently frames Brancaleone and his band within the European and Palestinian landscapes through which they pass, using only a limited number of the kind of close-up shots that privilege individual psychology over social-historical subjectivity. To say, however, that the *Brancaleone* films simply replace fantasy with social realism would be simplistic. This is especially true of their visual and aural aesthetic, in which brooding, empty landscapes and deserted towns, again inherited from Italian neorealism, give way to surreal, almost futurist interiors inhabited by a range of cameo characters (often women) in operatically camp costumes designed by Piero Gherardi, costume and design director on a number of Federico Fellini's films. While these stylized environments seem removed from the mimetic Middle Ages outside, in another way they crystallize the film's "medievalness." The scene in an Italo-Byzantine palace, for instance, where Brancaleone finds himself being whipped by the sexually frenzied, and very 1960s-looking, Lady Theodora (played by cult-horror actress Barbara Steele), is both anachronistic and essentially medieval according to the film's vision of a world in which cruelty, pain, and sacrifice become a perverse form of pleasure. The use, for the dialogue, of a pseudo-archaic, macaronic Italo-Latin of Monicelli's own devising (he says he "invented an Italian that

¹⁰ Mario Monicelli and Andrea Palazzino, "Il Medioevo di Monicelli: una parodia molto vera," *Babel* 15 (2007): 11–16, <<http://babel.revues.org/720>>, accessed 30 April 2013; Young, "Poverty, Misery, War," 38–39.

¹¹ Young, "Poverty, Misery, War," 39.

didn't exist") is in keeping with the films' overall comic strategy of offering "uno parodia molto vera," that is a meta-parody in which medieval chivalry and medievalist representation are lampooned by depicting a Middle Ages that is manifestly not real, but nevertheless aims to be "true" in the moral and ideological satire it offers. Monicelli reused this language in his 1984 comedy *Bertoldo, Bertoldino e Cacasenno*, set in ninth-century Veneto. This approach to satiric and parodic truth licenses the creation of a condensed medieval world in which the First Crusade and the Black Death co-exist as temporal indexes of a past epitomized by war and disease.

The question of the significance of the *Brancaleone* films' comic medievalist vision to "living memory" emerges directly in Landy's argument that they are social satires, which "explore affinities with contemporary cultural and political life."¹² While Monicelli has denied that the film satirizes contemporary Italy, elsewhere he has admitted that the film's anarchic bottom-up approach to portraying the Middle Ages, which is a clear indictment of modern Italy's self-serving vision of the medieval past, corresponds with the socialist perspective that abides across his oeuvre. His displaced satire of the delusional violence of Italian Fascism, for instance, is subtly present in Brancaleone's occasional maniacal outbursts in which he insists he is "il Duce" of his band. Characters who have power or authority are presented variously as mercurial, cruel, exploitative, and arrogant, while warmth and compassion are the preserve of the film's pariah figures, including the Satanist witch Tiburzia, who ultimately sacrifices herself to Death to save Brancaleone. In his satiric critique, Monicelli can be situated not only within *commedia all'italiana* but also within a fertile culture of comic medievalism emerging out of the Italian Left in the late 1960s and 1970s, that also included filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini (*The Hawks and the Sparrows*, *The Decameron*, *The Canterbury Tales*) and playwright and performer Dario Fo (*Mistero Buffo/The Comic Mysteries*).¹³

The medieval Church fares the worst in the films' satire of power, being presented as a chief perpetrator of aggression and intolerance. The representation of the Crusades as a pointless, chaotic, and grotesque chapter in religious history is perhaps the most obvious instance of this, but it is far from the only one: the deranged quest for power is common to cult leaders and popes alike. The modality of the films' satire is largely comic compression;

¹² Landy, "Comedy and Counter-History," 181.

¹³ For more on this culture, see Louise D'Arcens, "Dario Fo's *Mistero Buffo* and the Left-Modernist Reclamation of Medieval Popular Culture," in *Medieval Afterlives in Popular Culture*, ed. Gail Ashton and Daniel T. Kline (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 57–70; and Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo Militante: La politica di oggi alle prese con barbari e crociati* (Turin: Einaudi, 2011).

according to Monicelli, “it was easy to find farcical situations” (*situazione farsesche*) in medieval Catholic history,¹⁴ and so disparate historical details, such as competing claimants to the papacy, early Christian asceticism, and trials of faith are condensed into absurd “pan-medieval” scenes such as the papal face-off in *Brancaleone alla Crociate* where the dispute between the two would-be popes is resolved by Brancaleone being forced to walk across hot embers by a stylite who adjudicates the outcome from his pillar. Elsewhere, the tone is bleak and haunting. Arguably the films’ most moving episode is one in *Brancaleone alla Crociate* titled “The Ballad of Intolerance,” in which the itinerant band comes across a tree from whose branches dangle dozens of lynched bodies. When Tiburzia, who has the power to speak with hanged people, asks them how they got there, the disembodied voice of one corpse replies that the village priests and dignitaries rounded them up and killed them for their sins. These “sins” are mostly trifling and non-violent, ranging from an interest in astronomy to eating salami on a Friday, and even, in the case of one figure, simply being a Jew.

Several speeches in this scene contradict Monicelli’s claim that his films are not satirizing modern Italy, so its stark image of medieval atrocity resonates powerfully, despite the historical distance, with the enormities of the twentieth century, in particular anti-Semitism in twentieth-century Italy. When the band first see the tree in the distance, they mistake the corpses for “strange fruit,” a phrase immediately evocative of the doleful song made famous by Billie Holliday about the lynching of African Americans in the modern South. Later, after we learn of the innocent Jew’s execution, the voice of another body, claiming to “see afar” into time, says “[t]ravellers, be glad, the world will not forever be intolerant,” and offers a sanguine future vision of peace and equality that can only be taken as chillingly ironic in light of the monstrous intolerance of twentieth-century European history, and, more locally, the turbulence of Italy in 1970. The progressivist myth of modern civility is further crushed, this time without irony, when the unsettling voice of an especially ghoulish corpse utters an opposing prophesy: “you will be as we are.”¹⁵ In a perfect example of the technique Michel Chion has dubbed *voix acousmatique*, in which cinematic voice is freed from a specific speaking subject, projecting beyond the “world” of the cinematic text,¹⁶ the film’s use of voiceover for the corpses’ speeches in this scene means that their voices float beyond the diegesis, addressing not just the band but the audience’s living memory of atrocity, and, in Italy, its current experience of offi-

¹⁴ Monicelli and Palazzino, “Il Medioevo di Monicelli.”

¹⁵ *Brancaleone alla Crociate*, dir. by Mario Monicelli (Fair Film, O.N.C.I.C., 1970).

¹⁶ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, foreword Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 72.

cial violence and summary justice. Exploring the ideological force of Chion's notion, Slavoj Žižek emphasises the cross-historical nature of the acousmatic voice's address, that by "not locating the phenomenon [the source of the voice] in its historical totality" it instead speaks directly to the audience, compelling them to experience "a material presence which escapes historical mediation."¹⁷ In Monicelli's scene, the comic Middle Ages (although this is a dark scene in a lighter film) speaks obliquely but unmistakably to the present.

The *Brancaleone* films, then, showcase but do not resolve the twin ethical and representational dilemmas of serving the three masters of history, politics, and comedy. What they do demonstrate, however, is that comic medievalism uses amusement to trace an oblique but revealing path into the major moral, ethical, and political problems of modernity. Many of these are ripe for ridicule; others are no laughing matter.

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 129.

Justice Human and Divine: Ethics in Margaret Frazer's Medievalist Dame Frevisse Series

Lisa Hicks and Lesley E. Jacobs

According to Dorothy Sayers' fictional detective Lord Peter Wimsey, "In detective stories, virtue is always triumphant. They're the purest literature we have."¹ The rise of the historical detective novel – particularly the detective novel set in the medieval period – both complements and complicates Wimsey's claim. Certainly, virtue triumphs, but what counts as virtue in the fictional Middle Ages, and what counts as its triumph? To answer these questions, we must turn to ethics. The ethical questions raised by medievalist detective novels fall into two categories: first, questions about the ethics of the novelistic endeavor and its representation of the medieval world and, second, questions about representations of ethical life in the fictional world that the novel generates.² Questions about the novelistic endeavor touch on the ethics of medievalism as a whole as we test the possibility of honestly representing life in past centuries, from the simple avoidance of anachronism to the possibility of accessing mental attitudes from periods so different from our own.³ Questions about ethical life within the novel point us toward

¹ Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison* (New York: Harper, 2012, rpt), 136. Sayers herself was, of course, a medievalist.

² For more on fictional worlds, see David Lewis, particularly "Truth in Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15.1 (Jan 1978): 37–46. Lewis argues that fictional worlds are created or generated by the statements that are true of those worlds. Thus, the statement "Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street" is not true of modern-day London but is true of the fictional world generated by Conan Doyle's Holmes stories.

³ For a discussion of the challenge in historical mysteries of "recreating the 'feel' of a past time – what might be termed its 'texture,'" see Timothy W. Boyd and Carolyn Higbie, "Shamus-a-um: Having the Quality of a Classical Detective," *Theory and Practice of Classic*

explorations of both the reasons why we derive pleasure from crime stories set in the distant past and the similarities and differences between medieval characters and ourselves. Because they frequently deal with pressing ethical issues such as justice, revenge, desert, moral obligation, and so on, detective novels provide a fruitful source of inquiry for these questions.

This article will focus on the ethical attitudes depicted in Margaret Frazer's Dame Frevisse series. It argues that Frazer depicts Frevisse as an ethically liminal figure – a character caught between the Church-based, authoritarian ethical system often taken to be typical of medieval monastic life, and a more individualistic system typically associated with post-Enlightenment thought. Frazer encapsulates this tension between a Church-controlled, authoritarian system and an individualistic ethic in the late medieval culture of contemplation. By establishing Frevisse as a figure centered in the religious traditions of the late Middle Ages but occasionally torn between spiritual and temporal powers, Frazer places Frevisse both within and outside the prevailing ethical system of her day.

In order to portray Frevisse's role in the prevailing ethical system, Frazer must first establish the fictional world within which Frevisse exists – a world that draws on the reader's understanding of the late medieval past. Lee Patterson writes in his foundational *Negotiating the Past* that:

[w]hile wanting to do justice to the otherness of a distant past, the historian is unavoidably conditioned by his own historical situation; while concerned to incorporate and understand as much of the material relevant to his chosen problem as he can, he is also aware that that material is never raw data but rather produced by elaborate processes of interpretation – many of which are so much second nature as to be unrecognizable as interpretations as all.⁴

This historical-materialist account of the task of the historian can also describe the task of the writer of medieval mysteries: Frazer's own "processes of interpretation" seem bound up with the tension between autonomy and autocracy. In Frevisse, Frazer creates a character whose interiority and individuality seem familiar to modern readers but whose obedience to the hierarchical structures of her society – the Church, the English class system, and so forth – often feels alien. This navigation between the alien and the familiar

Detective Fiction, ed. Jerome H. Delamater and Ruth Prigozky (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 19.

⁴ Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), ix.

may help to explain the popularity of Frazer's novels and of medieval detective novels ("history-mystery," to use Alan Gaylord's phrase) in general.⁵

Another feature that helps account for the fascination of medieval mystery novels lies in the novels' accounts of medieval ethical systems. Puzzling out the ways in which those systems mirror ours and in what ways they diverge from ours represents one of the challenges of reading historical fiction. As we analyze that challenge, we should also consider what detective novels, with medieval settings or not, have to tell us about ethics. Certainly they depict the solving of ethical problems (crimes, murders, etc.), and, if the detective is portrayed with consistent interiority, they also show us how he or she feels about the process of uncovering a crime. How does the detective discover and investigate clues? How does he or she feel about the condemnation of the criminal – especially in narratives set in the premodern period, when death awaited murderers?⁶ The consistent presentation of these points gives readers the impression of experiencing a part of the past through the detective's ethical decisions; however, this experience is mediated through the particularly modern genre of the detective novel.

Frazer herself (presumably like many authors of historical fiction) is deeply attuned to this mediation of the past through the present and, in an article for *Medieval Academy News*, discusses some of her goals for imagined engagement with the past.⁷ After noting the psychological and logistical difficulties of imaginatively placing oneself in a different time, she imagines an interlocutor asking, "Why bother?" And she replies:

For me, the answer to that is that to live only inside one's own particular time and shape of space and thought, is to live impaired in sight and understanding. To be able to see with other eyes, to think – even peripherally or for a bare few moments – in another's mind, to feel with another set of feelings than our familiar everyday ones, is to grow, to stretch our limits of individuality a little larger, to reach our minds

⁵ See Alan T. Gaylord, "O Rare Ellis Peters: Two Rules for Medieval Murder," *Studies in Medievalism XX: Defining Neomedievalism(s) II*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), 129–46 (131–32). For a brief discussion of some medieval mystery series and of the "international phenomenon" of the "historical sub-genre" of the detective novel, see Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2010), 147.

⁶ Sayers portrays Peter Wimsey in *Busman's Honeymoon* (New York: Harper Torch, 1995) as suffering major mental breakdowns each time he solves a crime that sends a murderer to the gallows.

⁷ Margaret Frazer, "How Medieval Can You Be in a Medieval Murder Mystery?" *Medieval Academy News*, Fall 2005, < <http://margaretfrazer.com/essays/medieval-fiction.html>>, accessed 12 October 2013.

a little farther, to open our perception of our world and selves a little wider.

And that, surely, is not a bad thing by any reckoning.

The point, for Frazer, is empathy: by exploring others' perceptions and emotions, one expands one's understanding of others.

This notion that engagement with fiction can serve as a tool for the development of empathy represents one influential line of thought in contemporary philosophy and literature.⁸ Frazer's particular version of the empathy argument focuses on the importance of using remoteness in time as a tool for finding similarity in difference: her characters are removed in time, and their values are not ours, but we can still identify with their concerns and find points of resemblance between their world and ours. The job of the author, then, is to make the similarities apparent while not obscuring the differences. The writer of historical fiction must show fidelity to both the present and the past and must find ways to bridge the gaps between them.

One frequent device for bridging those gaps in medieval detective novels involves the use of a detective with religious affiliations.⁹ Religious affiliations serve several useful narrative roles. First, religiously affiliated detectives serve as plausible representatives of medieval ethical views. Modern readers see the Church as the main ethical system of Christian Europe; thus, readers are likely to view a detective affiliated with the Church as a figure of ethical importance. Next, religiously affiliated detectives possess intellectual credibility. Since men and women of the Church were the most highly educated members of medieval society, they can plausibly use such "modern" detecting methods as empirical observation, logic, and the assumption of natural rather than supernatural explanations of surprising events. In Frazer's novels, Frevisse's status as an intelligent, educated nun – and one often engaged in the office of hosteller, which takes her outside the cloister to the more open world of the guest-hall – positions her as an effective observer of facts and events in both the sacred and the secular worlds.

⁸ See, for example, Martha Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁹ Brother Cadfael, protagonist of Peters' series of mystery novels published in the 1970s through the 1990s and later of a televised adaptation, was the first series-detective in a medieval setting. A Welsh monk at the abbey of Shrewsbury in the mid-twelfth century, Cadfael tracks down murderers and untangles puzzles through a series of twenty novels that cross and recross the borders of England and Wales during the geopolitical turmoil of the civil wars of Stephen and Matilda. The Frevisse novels (and many other medieval series) build on conventions established in the Cadfael novels – conventions such as strong emphasis on the seasons as a method of establishing a sense of place, settings in times of political upheaval, alternation between "inside the convent" and "outside the convent" chapters, and so forth.

One of Frazer's variations on the common theme of the religiously affiliated medieval detective involves placing Frevisse in the late medieval period. This choice of time allows for a particular kind of clerical detective: Herbert Moller connects the rise of "affective mysticism" in the later Middle Ages with "a greater intensity of feeling, thinking, and observing."¹⁰ The inward focus that accompanies such an intensity serves as a central feature of Frevisse's personality, differentiating her from her fellow nuns and justifying her role as the detective.

The late medieval setting allows Frazer to situate Frevisse not only in a particular religious movement but also in a particular – and particularly effective – political moment. The deep ties between church and state in the late medieval period provide a vehicle for considering ethical dilemmas in the light of both spheres. The political setting of the Frevisse novels falls in the unstable late medieval period in England, in the years leading up to the Wars of the Roses, a time during which the breakdown of law and order led to ethical dilemmas unlikely under a strong king. The novels take place in a post-Edenic setting after the death of the idealized Henry V, so the political instability natural to the nominal rule of a child king feeds upon and is fed by the small upheavals that make up Frevisse's cases. Later, and corresponding to the change in authorship in the Frevisse novels,¹¹ their focus moves increasingly toward the political infighting under Henry VI that would culminate in civil war. Frazer has placed her heroine, although cloistered in a small priory in Oxfordshire, nonetheless in a position close to the center of power, as she is the (fictional) niece by marriage of Thomas Chaucer, son of the poet, and thus the first cousin of his daughter Alice, whose husband is the duke of Suffolk. Frevisse's relationship with Alice and with Alice's increasingly corrupt husband leads her out of her convent and closer to the court's political machinations than she would generally like to be, particularly near the close of the series as political concerns gradually supersede the more episodic local mysteries of Frazer's early books. Early mysteries like *The Novice's Tale* and *The Servant's Tale* involve murders in the priory and surrounding village, while later ones such as *The Maiden's Tale* and *The Bastard's Tale* center on political intrigues such as, respectively, negotiations over the release of the royal prisoner of war Charles of Orleans and the unexplained death of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. As the problems of

¹⁰ Herbert Moller, "The Social Causation of Affective Mysticism," *Journal of Social History* 4.4 (Summer 1971): 305–38 (306).

¹¹ The first six Frevisse novels were written under the pen name "Margaret Frazer" by the writing team of Gail Frazer and Mary Monica Pulver Kuhfeld (better known under another pen name, Monica Ferris). After *The Murderer's Tale*, Gail Frazer continued the series on her own while still retaining the "Margaret Frazer" pen name.

the microcosm move outward to encompass the macrocosm, Frazer makes clear the gradual breakdown of order as England moves toward the Wars of the Roses.

Frevisse's ability to move easily and ethically between the small setting of the priory and village and the more cosmopolitan world of the court stems not only from her life in Chaucer's household, but also from a childhood spent with her parents wandering through Europe. Her early travels exposed Frevisse both literally to a wider world and metaphorically to different points of view. When choosing Frevisse from among the nuns to take the priory steward's place in the village in *The Reeve's Tale*, the prioress Domina Elizabeth states, as if self-evidently, "None of the others is as able as you are to deal between men. None of us has been as much in the world as you have."¹² Domina Elizabeth includes herself among those less "in the world" than Frevisse, despite her own wealthy London background and her filial connection to a powerful man in the convent's life: their abbot, Gilbert.¹³ Frevisse's having been "in the world" and her being able to "deal between men," whether from that worldly experience or from her office as hosteller, offers her many different insights on the crimes supposedly committed around her. For instance, in *The Servant's Tale*, wandering players are suspected of a series of murders, and Frevisse alone resists condemning them. When the priory steward asks why she trusts them despite their lack of a settled home or patron, she answers, "I wasn't bred to the nunnery, Master Naylor. My parents were of the world. And very worldly. I've learned better than to believe something simply because it's said. Nor am I so ignorant that I think a man can be condemned out of hand for being one thing instead of another."¹⁴ This ability to dissociate person from stereotype occasionally makes Frevisse seem overly modern, but Frazer counters these impressions of anachronism with biographical details that influence Frevisse's judgment. For example, when Frevisse allows a Jew to leave England without denouncing him for his illegal presence there, her childhood memories of her father's friendship with a Jew allow her to differentiate between the ritual murders much feared in medieval England and a murder done for gain, and she chooses not to reveal his presence there "given the misguidance and corruption of England's laws these past years and the chaos into which London is presently fallen because of it."¹⁵ In short, Frevisse's conscience has been shaped by her life's roots in

¹² Frazer, *The Reeve's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 1999), 35.

¹³ At the beginning of *The Maiden's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 2004), Abbot Gilbert appoints his "sister in the world" as the priory's new head after Domina Alys has been removed in disgrace.

¹⁴ Frazer, *The Servant's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 1993), 42.

¹⁵ Frazer, *The Sempster's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 1996), 121–27 and 245. In

a world much wider than the worlds of most of her fellow nuns and other companions.

However, despite her appreciation for the part of her life that she spent "in the world," Frevisse chooses the convent, and Frazer represents the murder mysteries as interruptions in a life that Frevisse would prefer to be intensely and exclusively focused on prayer. We hear in the second book of the series that:

A recitation of familiar prayers could sometimes take her through the cold and dark emotions of the moment into the harmonies of the seven crystal spheres that were around the world and led by steps of grace into the light and joy surrounding the throne of God in Heaven [...] she could do that on occasion – leave the world in mind at least, for a greater, deeper, higher plane. Among her reasons for choosing to become a nun had been her desire to join more freely, more frequently with that high place.¹⁶

Frevisse seeks out this "high place" whenever she can, whether in the convent or out of it. In *The Squire's Tale*, Frevisse is a guest at a manor where she has no clear task: "Except pray, she suddenly thought; and the day, dismal ahead of her a moment before, lightened. Prayer – the slipping aside from the World's passing concerns into the greater quest of nearness to the Eternal – was one of the pleasures that had deepened through her years of nunhood."¹⁷ This contemplative focus typifies late medieval Christianity, which challenged both laypeople and the cloistered religious to turn their minds and hearts toward God.¹⁸

One means of achieving union with God was through spiritual reading and meditation: as literacy rates rose in the fourteenth and fifteenth centu-

perhaps a more "medieval" reaction (or what we might expect from a medieval character), Frevisse is shocked when she learns that the accused's Christian mistress knowingly "took a Jewish paramour" (194) and believes that penance given by her priest is her only way to salvation. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Prioress' Tale* is one of these stories of "blood libel" or what we would now call "urban legends" of Jews murdering Christian children.

¹⁶ Frazer, *The Servant's Tale*, 71.

¹⁷ Frazer, *The Squire's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 2000), 124. Frevisse here "set[s], as the blessed Richard of Hampole directed, the love of her heart upward:" see below for comments on Richard Rolle, who lived at Hampole in Yorkshire.

¹⁸ Richard Kieckhefer, in "Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late Medieval Piety," (*Church History* 67.1 [March 1998]: 32–51) attacks Ernest Troeltsch's idea that church, sect, and mysticism were necessarily separate, arguing that "the flourishing of mystical literature in the late Middle Ages was largely the product of shifting boundaries within the Church" (33).

ries, religious and ethical works were in increased demand both inside and outside the cloister.¹⁹ One of Frevisse's strongest roots in late medieval Christianity lies in her deep interest in books and reading as a means to engagement with the divine.²⁰ We hear early in the series of Frevisse's considerable learning, acquired in Thomas Chaucer's library in her youth. Since a certain amount of wealth was necessary for the enjoyment of books in the late medieval period, Frevisse's connection with Chaucer enables her to experience books beyond her Latin prayers and books specifically connected with the movement of affective piety.²¹ For example, Frevisse in *The Bishop's Tale* accepts as a bequest from her uncle an English copy of John Wycliffe's psalms and gospels, illegal in this period of Lollard activity and paranoia. Frevisse "had found [the book] as a girl. She had delighted in being able to read freely what was so slow and difficult to follow in Latin. Chaucer had not forbidden it to her, and her faith had never been hurt by it, only her dependence on what any ignorant priest might choose to say the Bible said."²² Frevisse finds similar support for her own faith in less controversial reading material as well – for instance, in the writings of the fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle. In one of the later novels in the series, Frevisse and her cousin Alice find in Chaucer's commonplace book an excerpt from Rolle that epitomizes the difference between their chosen lives:

Two lives there are for Christian men to live. One is called the active life for in it is more bodily work. The other is called the contemplative

¹⁹ See, for example, David Bell, "The Libraries of Religious Houses in the Late Middle Ages," esp. 126, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland: Volume 1: To 1640*, ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Cambridge Histories Online, Web, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521781947>>, accessed 11 October 2013, and Derek Pearsall, "Introduction" to *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475*, ed. J. Griffiths and D. A. Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 7.

²⁰ In *The Sempster's Tale*, Frevisse visits stationers' shops to buy books for the nuns at her priory to copy and sell to wealthy laywomen in nearby towns (42–43).

²¹ Frevisse's tastes in reading seem to have been formed in Chaucer's library, so the essentially lay nature of medieval affective piety can exist in her reading habits despite her cloistered state.

²² Frazer, *The Bishop's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 1994), 152. This view of the Wycliffite Bible follows the pattern of viewing the Lollards as precursors to later Protestant movements. The reference to "any ignorant priest" offers a particularly pointed instance of Frevisse's proto-modern ethic; contrary to official church doctrine, Frevisse sees individual understanding of religious texts as a key component of her faith. This slippage between proto-modernity and consistent historical and cultural detail with regard to late medieval religious practices may reflect a difference between the early, co-written Frevisse novels like *The Bishop's Tale* and the single-authored later texts.

life, for in it is more spiritual sweetness. The active life is much outward and in more travail and more peril, because of the temptations that are in the world. The contemplative life is more inward and therefore more lasting, and more certain, restful, delightful, lovely, and rewarding. For it has joy in God's love, and savor in the life that lasts forever.²³

The contemplative life – sometimes achieved by books and reading – is certainly the focus of Frevisse's aspirations, although her particular gift of seeing events clearly obligates her either by a superior's order or her own need for justice to search for murderers.

Frazer's series begins with a relative peace between Frevisse's own conscience and her vows of obedience. In the first books, the saintly Domina Edith rules over St Frideswide's, and her status as Frevisse's spiritual mentor as well as her religious superior ensures that official justice in the nunnery seldom deviates from Frevisse's own sense of ethics. In *The Servant's Tale*, Domina Edith observes Frevisse's distress when the players are being blamed for murder and orders, "on pain of breaking your vow of obedience, I command you: Learn what you can about all of this and prove their innocence, or their guilt. Not only to Master Montfort's satisfaction, but mine. And your own."²⁴ Master Morys Montfort, the coroner (or "crownner") who will later be murdered – satisfying many readers' baser impulses – in *The Clerk's Tale*, serves as the main antagonist in the first few novels of the series. Montfort's contempt for women's intellectual powers and his willingness to pin the crime on the most convenient suspect earn Frevisse's disdain and active enmity, which is entirely mutual. However, Domina Edith's view of him in the first novel of the series, *The Novice's Tale*, coincides precisely with Frevisse's: "I knew his father as crownner before him. He was another who always wanted his problems kept as simple as might be. And would not hesitate to make them that way if he could."²⁵ Montfort's drive to close cases quickly rather than accurately represents an abdication of individual responsibility and a willingness to rely on systems of authority rather than on the individual demands of moral and intellectual conscience. Although Frevisse's vows of obedience occasionally mean that she has to cooperate with him as the representative of the king's justice, their conflict reflects a basic tension between spiritual and temporal power that Frazer both sustains and complicates throughout the series.

²³ Richard Rolle, quoted in Frazer, *The Traitor's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 2007). Rolle, a major figure in the movement of affective piety, was also the author of the mystical work *Incendium Amoris* and *The Form of Living*, a guidebook for anchorites that we might now consider an ethical manual (or, in the vernacular, a self-help book).

²⁴ Frazer, *The Servant's Tale*, 180–81.

²⁵ Frazer, *The Novice's Tale*, 122.

This tension between the spiritual and the temporal emphasizes the division between the individualistic strand and the authoritarian strand that intertwine – and often pull against one another – to form the ethical system of the day. Frevisse often resents being asked to investigate crimes in the name of a power that fluctuates from the spiritual to the temporal, and her fiercest resentments are directed toward figures who manipulate authoritarian ethical systems to promote their own ends. Frazer most commonly locates this ethical ambiguity in the powerful figure of Bishop Beaufort, historical first cousin of Thomas Chaucer, who first asks for Frevisse's expertise in solving problems at Chaucer's funeral in *The Bishop's Tale*. A man who has called upon God to strike him dead if he lies then dies within the hour, but instead of simply accepting the death as God's will, the bishop, "with memory of things Thomas had said about her," asks Frevisse to investigate.²⁶ Specifically, Chaucer had said that Frevisse "[has] a way of finding out things that others do not see." Despite Beaufort's confidence in her judgment, Frevisse instinctively responds to him with distrust, which is borne out by the bishop's actions in the later novels. In *The Maiden's Tale*, for example, Beaufort forces Frevisse to conceal her knowledge of a murderer – a murderer whom Beaufort himself earlier ordered her to discover – because he realizes that revealing the truth would expose his own political aims.²⁷ This conflict between Frevisse's own dedication to truth and justice and the power-hungry ambition exemplified by the bishop (and, later in the series, the duke of Suffolk) again emphasizes Frevisse's preference for an ethic centered on individual values. She comes to distrust systems of authority because authority so often devolves into expedience. This anti-political strand in Frevisse's thinking often resonates with modern readers' cynicism about the relation between politics and ethics – a cynicism that may help to explain both the modern preference for individually centered ethical systems and Frevisse's own ethical preferences.

The similarities and divergences between Frevisse's own ethical system and the ethical systems of modern readers also play out in her attitude toward balancing justice and mercy – an attitude that varies with the nature of the crimes committed. In the early novel *The Outlaw's Tale*, she colludes to place the blame for an accidental killing on a teenage boy's dead father rather than on the boy, although she continues to feel guilt over that decision for months, and sees her exposure of another murderer in *The Bishop's Tale* as penance for it.²⁸ Later in the series, in *The Hunter's Tale*, she keeps to herself the solution of a particularly grisly murder, and not only because the murdered man had

²⁶ Frazer, *The Bishop's Tale*, 84.

²⁷ Frazer, *The Maiden's Tale*.

²⁸ Frazer, *The Outlaw's Tale*, 212–17, and *The Bishop's Tale*, 156.

delighted in abusing his family and household. Frevisse forces the family to disclose to one another that the man's grandson, a particular butt of the older man's cruelty, killed his grandfather and set his dog to kill his grandfather's corrupt friend. However, she does not plan to inform the temporal authorities of her knowledge, deciding instead that religion will be the better place to turn for the culprit:

For the world's authorities to know – crowner and sheriff and all – Sir Ralph's death would go unsolved and Sir William's be seen only as a fearsome mistake. For Miles there was the hope that penance might finally cleanse his heart and spirit of hatred's ugly dross and bring, in God's eyes, absolution for his sin of murder. And Frevisse found she could live with the law's justice not being done if a deeper justice was being answered, if payment was being made – payment of maybe a deeper and more healing kind than the law's justice would have exacted. Penance and love might well save Miles: the others' love for him and, as important, his love for them.²⁹

This focus on the individual over the system and on what Frevisse “[can] live with” rather than what authority demands highlights Frevisse's tendency to follow her own notions of mercy and justice if those notions conflict with the requirements of authority.

Justice is, of course, not the only point on which Frevisse's individualistic ethic pushes against the Church's more authoritarian ethos: Her vows of obedience occasionally provide another source of tension. In *The Widow's Tale*, Christiana, an allegedly “wanton” widow, is sent to St Frideswide's by her corrupt relatives, who have bribed the duke of Suffolk to order her imprisonment.³⁰ Frevisse's discomfort with Christiana's position is complicated by the fact that the abbot in charge of St Frideswide's is the brother of their current prioress, Domina Elizabeth, and their vows of obedience to him require them to follow Suffolk's corrupt orders when those orders come via the abbot. Nonetheless, she disobeys the prohibition against speaking to Christiana to ask about her welfare, and begins to believe her story when the widow blames her plight on Suffolk.³¹ Frevisse considers confessing her disobedience but decides that confession is unnecessary in this case – another instance of her tendency to favor her own individualistic code over the official ethics of the Church hierarchy.³² However, her final choice in the series

²⁹ Frazer, *The Hunter's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 2004), 318.

³⁰ Frazer, *The Widow's Tale* (New York: Berkeley Prime Crime, 2004), 62.

³¹ Frazer, *The Widow's Tale*, 64.

³² Frazer, *The Widow's Tale*, 63.

involves an acknowledgment of the role that her vows of obedience play in her own ethic: the series ends with Frevisse herself becoming prioress, gaining a position and power that she never desired.³³ The position of abbess places her in a position of authority opposed to the individualistic ethical system developed during the series, but her vows of obedience ironically bind her to follow the wishes of the other nuns, who have, in the final book, increasingly looked to her for leadership.³⁴

Frevisse's ambivalence toward her new position exemplifies the divided nature of her ethical loyalties that Frazer develops over the course of the series – divided loyalties that mark Frevisse as a liminal figure within her convent and her world at large. Political machinations and family ties connect her to the outside world, but these connections seldom accord with her own wishes, for they serve to pull her from the convent even as she tries to isolate herself within it by her wish for union with the divine. By creating a detective who exists in an ethically contested space, Frazer gives her readers a character whose sensibilities span the modern and the (perceived) medieval; Frevisse's individualism unites her with modern, post-enlightenment notions that see the individual as the center for ethical decision-making even as her continued fealty to the authoritarian ethic of the Church renders her a plausible representative of her own time. By firmly grounding Frevisse's character in the late medieval culture of contemplation, Frazer represents Frevisse's desire for a life of prayer as her central motivation – except, perhaps, for the search for truth.

³³ Gail Frazer died in February 2013. *The Apostate's Tale* was her last Frevisse novel. A few e-reader-only short stories follow it, and the relation of those stories to the Frevisse novels is complicated enough to fall beyond the scope of this article. She also wrote a series of medievalist mystery novels centered on the player Joliffe, who appears in several Frevisse novels including *The Servant's Tale*.

³⁴ See Frazer, *The Apostate's Tale*, 123–25, 157–59, and elsewhere.

The Song Remains the Same: Crossing Intersections to Create an Ethical World via an Adaptation of *Everyman* for Everyone

Carol L. Robinson
Daniel-Raymond Nadon
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Medieval English morality plays had the same general agenda as contemporary American community theatre has now: to teach values in the face of the challenges of a fundamentally and generally unethical world. In the former, the performance is intended to be more overtly didactic by promoting a particular Christian doctrine of ethics and by working to enforce the development of an ethical soul, all within the further proactive development of an ethical community that has been developed by the Church clergy. In the latter, the performance is more subtle and complex, as it promotes a more general doctrine of ethics and encourages the development of an ethical self, within the proactive development of an ethical community that has been developed by both members and non-members of any number of religious and secular institutions. The specific agenda of a particular medieval morality play and its contemporary adaptation should thus be expected to be different, if only for the reasons of a vast distinction in time, location, and culture.

¹ Nancy M. Resh passed away prior to the completion of this article; however, we include her here because her ideas were seminal to the play's production and to the pre-writing of scholarship that followed.

In the case of the English medieval morality play *Everyman*, the character Everyman faces the unethical acts of his life as a member of the merchant guild, within the corrosive environment of a growing medieval merchant class that prizes capital investments over spiritual growth. In the case of American Deaf playwright Willy Conley's contemporary adaptation, *For Every Man, Woman and Child: A Modern Morality Play Inspired by EVERYMAN*, the character Everyone (not *Everyman*²) faces the truth of unethical acts performed as a member of a gang of slackers, within a corrosive environment that has chained the character to a community engaged in senseless and criminal acts of thrill-seeking adventures. *Everyman* is about preparing the soul for an eternal afterlife. *For Every Man, Woman and Child* is more about coming to a good end in this life, regardless of the nature of the afterlife. Conley's play preaches responsibility toward the community: one's good deeds matter now (rather than upon the arrival of death), and one's positive connections with fellow humans are more important than one's connections with a higher power (real or not). In other words, Conley encourages commitments to interconnectedness, epiphanies of mutual identity, and recognitions of and celebrations of differences (regardless of race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and [dis]ability), regardless of culture, because such positive and loving acts heal the individual's self-esteem and simultaneously embolden the individual to acquire emotional maturity (inner self-growth, even as we move towards death) and a drive to seek out better environments.

This analysis will include a brief chronicle of the process of producing this play at Kent State University – Trumbull (October 2009) and also presenting it at the 24th International Conference on Medievalism (Siena College, October 2009)³ as a contribution to that year's conference theme:

² It is perhaps worth noting that even Conley's attempt to cross gender identity is now dated (to the late twentieth century), in that the character *Everyone*, while significantly more inclusive than the patriarchal *Everyman*, is still limited to either *man* or *woman*, nothing in between nor beyond. According to *Gender Spectrum*: "When a child is born, a quick glance between the legs determines the gender label that the child will carry for life. But even if gender is to be restricted to basic biology, a binary concept still fails to capture the rich variation observed. Rather than just two distinct boxes, biological gender occurs across a continuum of possibilities. This **spectrum** of anatomical variations by itself should be enough to disregard the simplistic notion of only two genders." Benjamin A. Costa, "Understanding Gender," *Gender Spectrum*, ed. Benjamin A. Costa, <<https://www.genderspectrum.org/understanding-gender>>, accessed 23 November 2013.

³ Willy Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child: A Modern Morality Play Inspired by EVERYMAN*, in *Vignettes of the Deaf Character and Other Plays* by Willy Conley (Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2009). Produced by Kent State University at Trumbull at Kent Trumbull Theatre (2009) and at The 24th International Conference on Medievalism and Religion (Siena College, 2009; Pamela Clements, Conference Chair).

Medievalism and Religion. The scholarship of community theatre ultimately involves a study of working with amateurs and semi-professionals to produce plays. (The exception to the Kent Trumbull Theatre production was Cleric Costes, a graduate of Kent State University, a former member of numerous Kent Trumbull Theatre productions, and now a professional actor who volunteered his time and energy to play Death.) This play provided the opportunity for the production team to explore the intersections between medieval times and post-9/11 America, between hearing and D/deaf cultures,⁴ between Christianity and religious pluralism, among the worlds of literature, theatre, and Deaf studies. We worked to maintain the “essence” of the medieval English play *Everyman* while reaching, through Conley’s adaptation, for a diverse and contemporary audience.

In other words, our text (this article) is a testimony to the empowerment of texts built upon texts, as well as to the further empowerment of performance of those words. It is a testimony of these processes (this “magic”) of people coming together – learning together, striving to celebrate one another together – to ultimately fuel a creative experience that, because it is collective and connective, becomes greater than the single entities of contribution to that process. The original Christian text, *Everyman*, assumes community in a very medieval Christian European experience. Conley’s text, *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, strives to assume a community in a very contemporary, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-ability (particularly D/deaf and hearing) worldly experience. Both the many individual experiences of reading, as well as the collective (colliding and dividing) experience of putting *For Every Man, Woman and Child* onto stage, created a new community, a *neomedieval* community (a community that rewrites medieval elements to conform to more contemporary values), a community that was more inclusive than the medieval community of *Everyman* ever was.

Cultural and Linguistic Intentions and Adaptation

Both works are allegorical; however, the allegory works in linguistically different ways. *Everyman*, a relatively short play of roughly 900 lines (prob-

Daniel-Raymond Nadon (Director), Nancy M. Resh (Sign Master), Carol L. Robinson (Dramaturg), <<http://www.deafdirections.org/everyone.html>>.

⁴ Deaf culture is not the same as deafness. One might be deaf or hard-of-hearing, but that does not automatically make that individual a member of Deaf culture. Deaf culture is not about hearing ability; it is about language and cultural nuances. For example, hearing children and their deaf parents, all for whom the primary language is a sign language (and there are roughly 150 different sign-languages in the world), would all be a part of Deaf culture; the elderly who become deaf but still strive to communicate with a spoken language are not a part of Deaf culture.

ably a translation of the Dutch play *Elkerlijck*), is frequented by rhyming, sometimes in couplets. The recurring rhymes reflect some of the linear-poetic (time-based, sound-based) heritage of medieval English. *For Every Man, Woman and Child* is also a short play, and the language – which is not converted into lines, does not rhyme, and lacks even some of the figurative language of *Everyman* – is secondary to how it can be translated into the spatial-poetic rhythms often used in American Sign Language. For the Deaf world, *Everyman* becomes visually mute: completely voiceless and apparently also unable to hear the voice of God, since the communication is in a spoken language rather than in a sign language. It is perhaps ironic, then, that medieval scholars suffer the same consequences of a deafness (of the inability to hear spoken words of the Middle Ages) toward medieval, written, sound-based languages that contemporary deaf individuals suffer toward contemporary sound-based languages. The difference in the consequential experiences, however, is dramatic, for the former is one of pure technical capability (e.g., we cannot hear recordings of medieval spoken language or travel back in time to listen), while the latter is one of a form of *audism*.⁵ While *For Every Man, Woman and Child* is written in contemporary English, the written English is written with the intention to be performed in American Sign Language (or a combination of American Sign Language and spoken English). Indeed, a significant challenge in performing this play at Kent Trumbull Theatre was for Sign Master Nancy M. Resh to help the actors and Director Daniel-Raymond Nadon find the best poetic translation and dramatic expressions from Conley's cues and descriptions in the English written text; this effort was actually rather collaborative as Deaf actors and professional interpreters struggled to give support with their translations

⁵ *Audism* is a relatively new term, used to denote speech bias and discrimination against those who cannot hear. Deaf theatre and Deaf Americans, in particular, have been caught in the middle of a pro-Deaf activism that strives to promote the use of American Sign Language in a fight against audism, while also struggling to survive within the dominating speaking world, if not by speaking and lip-reading (both of which are talents, not skills), then with the use of interpreters and even, in desperate moments, paper and pen. There are two types of individuals affected by audism: (1) individuals who are members of a fully structured community, who use a sign language, such as American Sign Language, as the primary language; these individuals are *Deaf* not because of hearing loss but because of cultural identity (and this community includes hearing individuals), and (2) individuals who suffer from some level of hearing-loss but who strive to function as fully as possible within the hearing world, using a spoken language as the primary language; these individuals are *deaf*. Thus, if a hearing person tries to use sign language or even to gesture and pantomime, that individual is more likely to be appreciated. Few boundaries were left intact, and pluralism overtook binary structures.

from Conley's English into American Sign Language.⁶ It was a very pluralistic process.

Allegorical characterization also varied, becoming pluralistic, perhaps because it is directly tied to language. *Everyman* is written for a medieval, Christian, patriarchal, and hearing audience, and the medieval character Everyman is intended as an allegorical universal figure. *Everyman* is defined by speech, by voice (including the voice of the Christian God) *only*. The argument is often made that the medieval character, Everyman, symbolized everyone in the Middle Ages; however, this character, as this medieval play is performed in contemporary times, becomes an allegorical marginalizing figure, excluding anyone who does not identify with the traditional male gender. Moreover, even though the ties between language and characterization in the medieval *Everyman* may not have been made with the intention to exclude anyone, Conley's adaptation points to that gender marginalization, as well as to a fundamental linguistic marginalization that is still very strong today. *For Every Man, Woman and Child* strives to eliminate that marginalization by renaming the character as Everyone. In the Kent Trumbull Theatre production, the character Everyone was performed by two men (one Deaf and signing, one hearing and speaking) and two women (one Deaf and signing, one hearing and speaking), placing an experiential emphasis upon the pluralism of community and communication.

Symbolizing the struggle to bridge the pluralistic gaps caused by moats of communication in Conley's play is the character Death. Death is *deaf* – not *Deaf* – and thus truly disabled, for he can use neither sign language nor spoken language; instead, he strives to communicate with gesture and pantomime. Death, in other words, is marginalized from both the hearing and Deaf worlds. Death was played by deaf (not Deaf) actor Cleric Costes.⁷ Costes played the character as a Chaplinesque, deaf old man with arthritis

⁶ There is no written form of American Sign Language, although there have been attempts to create one. One might argue that the adaptation of a work from one language into another would not be unfamiliar to those of medieval England who worked to adapt back and forth between various dialects of English and other languages, such as the sacred Latin. However, the grammatical structure of American Sign Language is radically different from that of spoken/written English. ASL is non-linear, a concept language (like Chinese) that has no use for prepositions or articles. Thus, it should be no surprise to find that Conley's contemporary written English adaptation has a grammatical structure that is more conducive to further adaptation into performed American Sign Language: contemporary English is being used as a transitional language from late medieval English and culture into contemporary American Sign Language and Deaf culture.

⁷ "I never made much of an effort to connect with the Deaf community, despite the fact there is a thriving segment of the population in my hometown. This play, *For Every Man, Woman, and Child*, is the first true interaction I've had with people who suffer the same prejudices as me. And I'll probably be all the better for it." Cleric Costes, *Downplayed and*

(Conley's justification for his inability to communicate in ASL). Costes once observed, "Those of us born with a hearing loss (whether minor or major) tend to be much more skilled in spatial awareness than those who aren't."⁸ On stage, Death struggles to communicate successfully with both Deaf and hearing characters.⁹ Off stage, Costes struggled to communicate successfully with both Deaf and hearing actors and crew. Sign Master Nancy M. Resh noticed at the first rehearsal that factions were already forming among the cast and crew; hearing actors were located in house right; deaf actors in house left. She challenged everyone to eliminate these boundaries, to work as a team.

Intentions of Values and Communities

The intention of both *For Every Man, Woman and Child* and *Everyman* is to serve an audience with an ethical lesson; however, this lesson is a work of art that is *for* the community, not *of* or *by* the community. As Aaron Kelstone rightly observes, "Creating life on stage that challenges an audience requires playwrights to have the courage to grasp our raw nerve. Holding on for dear life, they reveal the tension that exists within those poignant moments surrounding our first mistake, our first bad choice, our first lost love, our first realization that life has an ending."¹⁰ This, he argues, is much of what Willy Conley's plays are all about: the art of communicating an experience on the stage. A professor at Gallaudet University, Conley is ultimately a theatre professional. Additionally, Greg Walker notes, morality plays such as *Everyman* were "small-scale productions, suitable for performance by troupes of between five and seven adult actors,"¹¹ and Thomas J. Garbáty describes the medieval *Everyman* as having been "performed occasionally by guilds but more often by wandering professional players, or perhaps actors permanently

Upstaged, "The Deaf Experience," 3 September 2009, <<http://downplayedandupstaged.blogspot.com/search/label/childhood>>.

⁸ Costes, *Downplayed and Upstaged*, "Auditions: Part Two (Day One)," <<http://downplayedandupstaged.blogspot.com/2009/08/auditions-part-two-day-one.html>>.

⁹ "Some phrases are actually proving far more difficult than expected. How does one mime 'sister' or 'cousin' without resorting to sign language or speech? It's proving to be quite a task and I've spent countless hours on a gesture only to realize it makes no sense and had to start all over. These mimes have to be crisp, clear, and easily recognizable," Costes, *Downplayed*.

¹⁰ Aaron Kelstone, "Foreword," in Willy Conley, *Vignettes of the Deaf Character and Other Plays* (Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2009), x.

¹¹ Greg Walker, ed., *Medieval Drama; An Anthology* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 209.

attached to noble houses.”¹² However, contemporary community theatre, such as the Kent Trumbull Theatre, holds a different fundamental function: rather than the community striving to support the artistic development of content and form by professional actors, the content and form strive to support the art of community development between amateur actors and audience alike. Kent Trumbull Theatre serves both the campus and the surrounding community, and this production also went on the road to perform nearly 500 miles away for the ISSM conference. Furthermore, the contemporary audience in this particular case is perhaps more varied (students, community members, scholars) for the Kent Trumbull Theatre production than it would have been for a medieval troupe (anyone who happened to be passing by in the village). Thus, while the element of travel of this troupe might be shared with the traditions of medieval troupes, and while Willy Conley and the anonymous playwright of *Everyman* might be said to share a kindred spirit of theatre professionalism, particularly in the didactic styles of their two plays, the probable community experiences of the medieval productions and most productions of Conley’s published plays differ significantly from the experiences of the Kent Trumbull Theatre production.

Both plays serve as a call to action, though for very different reasons. The call to action in both plays is a call to right behavior; however, while the entire focus of that action is upon death and facing God in *Everyman*, the focus in *For Every Man, Woman and Child* is more upon the actions (or inaction) themselves. Garbáty sets the tone of *Everyman* thus:

A certain fatalism surrounds the man who is wealthy in worldly goods and friends but poor in spirit and good deeds. Slowly he is stripped naked to the bare soul; and only when this is mortified is it pure. The allegory of dying is realistic: man stops; life goes on by. The end for every man is lonely, and only faith in eternal salvation can ease the passage. To a medieval audience, for whom death was a common and vivid phenomenon, suddenly and frighteningly appearing in war and pestilence, the depiction of *Everyman*’s agony on the stage must have been a grim experience.¹³

In Conley’s adaptation, the fatalism surrounds anyone who is corrupt or criminal (poor in spirit) and materialistic (not necessarily wealthy). The friendships are portrayed in both plays in the same light: as tenuous communities that may or may not support individual endeavors or challenges (such

¹² Thomas J. Garbáty, *Medieval English Literature* (Lexington, MA, and Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1984), 907.

¹³ Garbáty, *Medieval English*, 907.

as facing Death/death). The end for every man in the medieval play and for everyone in Conley's play is the same: a lonely experience that is ultimately resolved by some sort of salvation, clearly eternal and with God in *Everyman*, but less clear and less Christian (involving allusions to some form of reincarnation) in *For Every Man, Woman and Child*. The audience experience is also different. For medieval audiences, death is very real and everywhere. For contemporary audiences, death is more fictionalized (in movies and videogames) and the reality of death is often safely compartmentalized to within the walls of hospitals and other institutions, out of sight of the everyday person.

In both *Everyman* and *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, Death is the summoner. Elizabeth Harper and Britt Mize point out that, in *Everyman*, "The most central economic language in the play is the description of Everyman's judgment as a reckoning of accounts. No other metaphor is used to describe his anticipated appearance in God's presence" and thus gives this figure of speech, which is "biblical in origin and extremely common throughout the Middle Ages," a sort of "new life," as it provides the play with "its most memorable and concrete image, the account book, and putting it in the hands of a businessman, someone who knows about keeping accounts."¹⁴ This figure of speech carries over into Conley's adaptation with a further twist on the image. In *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, Death leads Everyone into a Carnival, where he gestures that the spirits of the universe want to see records:

EVERYONE: The spirits of the universe want to see my records. What records?

DEATH: (*Gestures.*) A list of items.

EVERYONE: The spirits want to see my bank account?

DEATH: (*Gestures.*) Your whole self.

EVERYONE: I don't have any life account. You mean life insurance?¹⁵

Eventually, the summoner Death leads Everyone to Good Deeds, who seems to be akin to a modern-day social worker. The character Everyone asks Good Deeds to join him/her on the journey to the grave, to which Good Deeds replies, "I will, but we have to do something about your records [...]. (*She pulls out a big pile of assorted papers.*) Parking tickets. Speeding tickets. DWI

¹⁴ Elizabeth Harper and Britt Mize, "Material Economy, Spiritual Economy, and Social Critique in *Everyman*," *Comparative Drama* 40.3 (Fall 2006): 275.

¹⁵ Willy Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child* in *Vignettes of the Deaf Character and Other Plays* (Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press, 2009), 153 (Scene 3).

violations. Overdue bills. IRS summons. Subpoenas to appear in court for shoplifting.”¹⁶

Everyman has a medieval Christian ethos and portrays right behavior, *good deeds*, as weak in substance, as lacking, but able to look stronger once Everyman has confessed (with the help of knowledge), realized the folly of his friendship with goods (of wealth and materialism). Roger A. Ladd notes a pun on Goods and Good Deeds as signaling a “subtle estates satire” that points to the similar structures shared between “spiritual and material economies.”¹⁷ Indeed, Elizabeth Harper and Britt Mize argue that “there is good reason to believe that *Everyman* is less about mismanaging figurative assets than it is about loving the wrong kind of wealth.”¹⁸ Ultimately, however, the end result is the same. Once Everyman has let go of his attachment to wealth and goods and has paid penance for this avarice, Good Deeds states:

I thanke God now I can walke and go
And am delyuered of my sykenesse and wo.
Therefore with Eueryman I wyll go and not spare.
His good workes I wyll helpe hym to declare.¹⁹

Cleansed of everything save his good deeds, Everyman is prepared to face God.

For Every Man, Woman and Child also initially portrays Everyone’s *good deeds* as weak and lacking, and, indeed, Everyone refers to Riches (Conley’s renaming of Goods) as “Someone I’ve loved all my life.”²⁰ While both Everyone and Everyman share a “faith in riches” that “leads to [his/her] ridiculous attempt to bribe Death,”²¹ clearly the pun on Goods and Good Deeds has been lost in translation, and the appreciation for collecting wealth and goods has also changed as Riches is more representative of the gambling world of contemporary times than of the developing mercantile world of the Middle Ages. Upon having gone through confession, Good Deeds tells Everyone, “See what your confession did? All of your bad deeds are gone – they are burned up. Here’s your life’s record. Clean.”²² While the medieval

¹⁶ Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, 163 (Scene 8).

¹⁷ Roger A. Ladd, “My condicion is mannes soule to kill” – *Everyman*’s Mercantile Salvation,” *Comparative Drama* 41.1 (Spring 2007): 66.

¹⁸ Harper and Mize, “Material Economy,” 264.

¹⁹ Garbáty, *Medieval English*, 923 (ll. 619–22).

²⁰ Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, 160 (Scene 7).

²¹ Harper and Mize, “Material Economy,” 267.

²² Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, 173 (Scene 12).

Everyman is armed with a few “good workes” all that Conley’s Everyone is armed with is a “clean record.” The afterlife journey is also different. In *Everyman*, Good Dedes reassures the near-death Everyman, “Fere not, I wyll speke for the.”²³ In *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, Good Deeds reassures the near-death Everyone, “Now that you have knowledge, you will come full circle and begin again. I will help you finish your journey so that you can be reborn.”²⁴

A Carnival of (Mis)Communication and All That This Implies

In the world of professional theatre, Aaron Kelstone argues that enduring playwrights “yank us back from the yearning to look homeward and reveal to us, in living color, our flaws and errors; then, from that chaos and pain, they enable us to change, to let go, and to step toward the unknown that we fear daily in our busy lives.”²⁵ In the world of community theatre, the test of endurance is with the production experience, regardless of the professionalism of the playwright or the play. Postmodern ethics, unlike Christian ethics, are not based upon universal or unchanging principles. In this spirit, our 2009 production of the play attempted to celebrate an infinite number of valid life-experiences and becoming even more inclusive by eliminating the boundaries between all of the various viewpoints and statuses. To do this, we needed to redefine who “Everyone” was. We chose to demonstrate an increasing cultural and perhaps therefore ethical inclusiveness with regard to a variety of issues: faith, gender, language, different abilities, the notion of community. For example, in order to maximize inclusion of all people, we chose to accept that most of the boundaries between us as human beings are arbitrary and ambiguous. If indeed we were performing for every man, woman, and child, we wanted to identify areas where the texts (both the original and Conley’s) speak to a specific group of people and try to broaden the scope by adjusting these divisive elements. In other words, instead of acknowledging our differences and the boxes into which they place us, we wanted to force our actors/characters out of their boxes and force the audiences to look beyond them.

As diverse in subject matter as they can be, Greg Walker claims that morality plays share a “didactic purpose and their focus on the nature of the human condition.”²⁶ A medieval morality play, such as *Everyman*, is highly conducive to adaptation. It was a form of play “capable of mutation and

²³ “Fear not, I will speak for you [to God].” Garbáty, *Medieval English*, 929.

²⁴ Conley, *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, 173 (Scene 12).

²⁵ Kelstone, “Forward,” x.

²⁶ Walker, *Medieval Drama*, 209.

adaptation, the allegorization of Catholic spiritual teaching easily converting to an allegorization of Protestant or humanist moral and political teaching,” argues Rowland Wymer; “The flexibility of the form was such that, by the 1560s, it is sometimes impossible to make meaningful distinctions between morality plays and a variety of other genres that make some use of allegorical techniques.”²⁷ Natalie Crohn Schmitt argues that:

while the object of the [medieval morality] plays is didactic, their effect is mimetic; that, more literally than the analyses have allowed, the plays provide a phenomenological account of existence, and that the concepts “allegory,” “personified abstraction,” and “universalized type” do not account for the whole of the medieval experience of the plays, nor for the whole of our experience of them either.²⁸

However, it is worth noting that, while the qualities of morality plays may not change in purpose and form, the human condition changes constantly, and that affects the focus of a morality play’s content. In other words, we suspect that this flexibility and these mimetic qualities of the medieval morality play were not intended to be as far-reaching as Conley’s adaptation, much less our performance of Conley’s adaptation, became.

With the Kent Trumbull Theatre production of *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, the struggle to recognize the importance of performing good deeds, both on the stage and off the stage, became vital. On top of such life struggles was the struggle to communicate between those who best understood spoken English and those who best understood American Sign Language. Much like the character Death in Conley’s play, there was a lot of gestural communication. It became clear to all of us working together that, without proactive good deeds (a hug, a pat on the shoulder, a few words or signs of encouragement, an extra effort to successfully communicate), there would be a loss of the basic reason for living, a lack of drive to find interconnection between human beings, to love one another without condition, to share.

While the deed of *interconnectivity* was not particularly important in either the text of *Everyman* or the text of *For Every Man, Woman and Child*, it was crucial in the production of Conley’s play. Certainly, the stakes are high in both performance texts, and *Everyman/Everyone* must figure this out. The stakes were also high, from a much more secular-humanist perspec-

²⁷ Rowland Wymer, “Shakespeare and the Mystery Cycles,” *English Literary Renaissance* 34.3 (September 2004): 265–85 (265).

²⁸ Natalie Crohn Schmitt, “The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays,” *Comparative Drama* 12.1 (Spring 1978): 23–34 (23).

tive, in the actual performance of Conley's text, as there were moments when it looked as though the performances would have to be cancelled because of the personal problems affecting the cast. Such a cancellation, however, meant entirely collapsing the central point of community theatre, and we fought against this death. Both plays recognize the ultimate responsibility for one's actions. Just as Fellowship in the medieval play *Everyman* points to the frailty of friendship, the Slackers in Conley's adaptation emphasize not only the frailty of friendship, but even the potential destructiveness of certain types of friendships. A lack of this interconnectivity, particularly at a deeper level, leaves us with the emptiness of fleeting fun and destructive behavior. A lack of interconnectivity is of no meaningful common, or even individual, good. Furthermore, without a shared (institutionalized) faith or set of (indoctrinated) ethics, we had to work especially hard to bring people together: for the sake of our humanity, common ground for the common good. We thus held a shared community of diversity. These lessons are even more important in our postmodernist society, where not only do we – as audience members, as cast, as crew – recognize a plurality of human identities, but we question the very nature of identity itself. It was a complexity of subtle lessons, indeed.

Telling this story to and for “every man, woman and child,” however, requires an expansion to the definition of who *everyone* is.²⁹ Movement from medieval times through the 1980s (when Conley's play was originally conceived and adapted) to today demonstrates an increasing need for inclusiveness with regard to a variety of issues, and community theatre is supposed to be *by* the community (or communities), *for* the community(ies). The ethics of Modernism and Essentialism surround the proper way for people of different cultures (ethnicities, abilities, political affiliations, sexualities) to interact. In this spirit, Conley's text celebrates a multiplicity of life experiences. It opens the text up to minority and otherwise marginalized identities and viewpoints with regard to many groups, issues, and ideas. It adds a pluralistic view of faith, gender, and the deaf- and hearing-worlds. It adds great spirits from a number of vastly different faiths, and tacitly accepts different, but connected, paths to God from each of these spirits. It accepts both male and female as independent constructs. However, it falls short of offering more than one human purpose or more than one vision of right or wrong behavior. The ethics, while appropriated to reflect a modern world, remain fairly constant with the original text.

²⁹ One struggle that we felt we failed to overcome was the one posed by the title of the play, which was very forward for the 1980s in recognizing female gender but today fails to recognize the now-established identification of more than just a binary set of gender identities, more than just *man* or *woman*.

The universal theme involved in both *Everyman* and *For Every Man, Woman and Child* (the process of facing one's mortality and inevitable death) served as the first point of intersection between individuals, as well as between conflicts within a single individual, but in radically different ways. In this case, there were four general types of community audiences: (1) members of the Kent State University at Trumbull community, (2) members of the surrounding northeast Ohio community, (3) members of the International Society for the Study of Medievalism, and (4) members of the Siena College community. One member of one community of one audience recently stated, "A thing that struck me the most was how much the poignancy of *Everyman*'s situation was increased by the use of ASL – can't 'read' sign language, but I could see how the grief and despair leapt out at the audience in a way I had never experienced before."³⁰ In exploring these intersections of both medieval and contemporary ethics, members of the Kent Trumbull Theatre production (cast, crew, and audience) were confronted by the need to accept that most of the boundaries that human beings place between each other, ethical or not, living in the Middle Ages or living today, are arbitrary and ambiguous in the end.

Obviously, death permeates everything. This allegorical concept of death remains poignant today, even among the members of the community that produced the production of *For Every Man, Woman and Child* at Kent Trumbull Theatre. For example, within less than a year of the production's closing show, Nancy M. Resh, who was Co-Producer and Sign Master for the play, as well as resident campus ASL instructor, passed away (after making initial contributions to this article). We saw (and still see) how fragile our lives are and the importance of shared human experiences, of shared values, of inclusivity – crossing intersections to create an ethical world.

Hear my song. People won't you listen now? Sing along.
 You don't know what you're missing now.
 Any little song that you know
 Everything that's small has to grow.
 And it has to grow!³¹

³⁰ Lauryn Mayer. RE: the performance at The 24th International Conference on Medievalism (Siena College) in October, 2009 (Facebook message to Carol Robinson, 4 August 2013). For more quotes from cast, crew, and audience, please see the documentary film *Listening to You, Listening to Me, Listening to Everyone: A Neomedieval, Deaf/Hearing, Community Theatre Experience* (2012, 2014), by Carol L. Robinson, <<http://www.deafdirections.org/everyone.html>>.

³¹ Led Zeppelin, "The Song Remains the Same," *The Song Remains the Same*, 1976.

Bringing Elsewhere Home: *A Song of Ice and Fire's* Ethics of Disability

Pascal J. Massie and Lauryn S. Mayer

As essay after essay in this series has reminded us, the term “neomedievalism” is too multivalent and maddeningly complex to define with any satisfaction: any attempt to create *a* definition invariably oversimplifies the concept or distorts it to fit current needs. In the case of neomedievalism, rather than attempt another iteration of an Ur-definition, Carol R. Robinson and Pamela Clements have done invaluable work in creating a field guide to understanding the characteristics of neomedievalism. In brief, we can call a text neomedieval when it does one or more of the following:

1. It is playful or ironic in nature.
2. It calls attention to its own construction, often as a work of bricolage.¹
3. It deliberately shatters any possibility for a “sealed world” of the text.
4. It refuses the nostalgic fantasy of being able to retrieve the medieval past.
5. Its task is to create a conscious vision of an alternative universe.²

This last item holds the most promise as a way of reading George R. R. Martin's multi-volume *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a text concerned with particular ethical issues surrounding disability: the damage ableist discourses and narratives inflict on the disabled.

¹ Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements, “Living with Neomedievalism,” in *Studies in Medievalism XVIII: Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 55–75.

² Carol L. Robinson, “Some Basic Definitions,” <<http://medieval electronic multimedia.org/definitions.html>>, accessed 8 December 2013.

In the landmark case *Arline vs. Nassau County*, Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., summarizing the need for an inclusive definition of disability, noted the problems that narratives of disability posed for the disabled: “society’s accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment.”³ Nancy Mairs, a well-known writer, MS sufferer, and advocate for the disabled, echoes this statement in her canonical essay “On Being a Cripple”:

In our society, anyone who deviates from the norm is expected to compensate. Like fat people, who are expected to be jolly, cripples must bear their lot meekly and cheerfully. A grumpy cripple isn’t playing by the rules [...] . One way or the other then, I wind up feeling like Tiny Tim, peering over the edge of the table at the Christmas Goose, waving his crutch, piping God’s blessing down upon us all. Except that I don’t feel like playing Tiny Tim. I’d rather play Caliban, a most scurvy monster.⁴

In describing the social expectations, fears, and fantasies surrounding the disabled, Mairs chooses her two tropes from literary icons (Charles Dickens and Shakespeare), in the process making an implicit comment on the power that widely read texts have to inform ideologies of disability. In Martin’s neomedievalist series, the categories of victim and monster, “normal” and “disabled” are continually challenged and rewritten in a way that constitutes an overall critique of ableist discourse.

The most frequent representations of disability in works of fiction follow a set of assumptions that is probably shared by the majority of these fictions’ consumers. They indicate or assume that:

1. Disability is a state of lack/deprivation/want. The very term suggests that disability is not only a deviation from a norm but a diminishment of personal and social identity.
2. The disabled must conform to a certain set of narrative structures and psychological expectations outside of which she becomes illegible.
3. Disability is an unfortunate state of dependence upon others. The disabled are evaluated on how much they either a) triumph, to their limited abilities, over that condition or b) gratefully acknowledge the sacrifices of the more “autonomous.”

³ *Arline vs. Nassau County* (480 U.S. 273).

⁴ Nancy Mairs, “On Being a Cripple,” in *Plaintext: Essays* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 37.

4. In order to keep the lines between the able and disabled body clear, disability is framed as relatively rare and exceptional (even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary).

Arguably, the second and fourth points are the most prevalent in literary representations of the disabled. Physical-disability narratives focus on the disabled body as either innately insufficient or as the visible sign of innate moral corruption (the Batman villains are the most notable modern example of this latter trope, and this pattern is made necessary by the inherent moral ambiguity of the hero). In both cases, they are marked by lack: the inability of the disabled subject to achieve his or her full potential. From admiration to pity, from disgust to curiosity, the disabled need only appear on the stage to cause a strong, and often contradictory, emotional response among the abled. In Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, the *cour des miracles* (court of miracles) constitutes a counter society of thieves, beggars, and criminals with its own rules and political organization. Populated by the crippled of all sorts (real or fake) who depend on alms to survive, the spectacle of the *cour des miracles* causes an array of emotions varying from disgust to pity to amusement when the beggar who was crippled all day long "miraculously" walks again upon his return to the cour.

In some instances, the physical disability indicates a sacrifice that allows for acquiring some abilities of a higher nature. Homer is blind, but his blindness allows him to listen to the Muses. Tiresias's blindness indicates that he has transcended the common realm of the mortals, his prophetic powers allow him to communicate with the divine. Professor X (Charles Francis Xavier) of the *X-men* corpus is a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair, but he is a scientific genius and a powerful telepath. Those disabled have transcended the usual limitations of embodiment. In the barter between the body and the mind, their physical loss is their spiritual gain. If the disabled subject is a victim, he or she is then funneled into several equally limiting narratives: "the burden," "Tiny Tim," "the cultural symbol," or "the triumph of the human spirit."

If the disability is marked as a visible sign of innate corruption, the disabled subject can either remain evil until the end (in which case the destruction of what would otherwise be a pitiable body becomes a laudable act), or she can become the subject of a "redemption narrative" (in which case her rage over her disability turns to grief/wisdom and an acceptance of the limitations of that state). As Tobin Siebers notes, disability has a symbolic function, operating as:

a political process through which private emotions and thoughts are made compelling to the public imagination. The political cannot exist

in the absence of such symbolism because it described the dynamic by which individuals are recognized by others and gathered together into communities.⁵

Thus, Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a hunchback, but, as Siebers notes, "his disability represents deceitfulness and lust for power, not a condition of his physical and complex embodiment."⁶

The fourth point notes also an attempt to locate disability elsewhere, and in a far more insidious manner. Its agenda is to break up disability into "acceptable" and "nonacceptable" categories. "Acceptable" disabilities are those that are most common and not coded as such: the wearing of glasses/contacts, or non-obtrusive hearing aids, the cast (indicating a temporary condition and a course toward recovery), the "invisible" use of prescriptions to regulate hormones, brain function, glands, and the like. In short, what is common/invisible is not disability and vice versa. As the cast shows, we will accept disability as long as it advertises itself as a temporary situation. No one calls the athlete in traction "disabled"; no matter how long her recovery may take, the promise of recovery itself is a guarantor of "normality."⁷ The effort to keep a clear line of demarcation between "them" and "us" occurs despite the fact that a stable biomedical condition to classify a variation as impairment is regularly called into question by the existence of classification shifts.⁸ Thus, homosexuality has recently been de-medicalized while shyness is now considered a medical condition. People with Parkinson's disease, Type II diabetes, emphysema, forms of dementia, schizophrenia, and HIV, among others, are typically not regarded as disabled even though their ability to perform certain daily tasks (or even most of them) can be very significantly hindered, more so, in some cases, than those who are perceived as "disabled."

⁵ Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 48.

⁶ Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 48.

⁷ The lead case on this issue is *Sutton vs. United Airlines Inc.* Two sisters who trained as commercial pilots with 20/20 vision with corrective lenses but less than 20/20 without them were removed from selection interviews by United Airlines on the ground that they did not meet the company's vision requirement. The defendant (United Airlines) argued that the women were not disabled since their impairment was corrected through the use of technological aid. The Supreme Court (2146, *per* Sandra Day O'Connor) reasoned that the ADA restricts coverage to individuals whose impairments are not mitigated by corrective measure. See Fiona Kumari Campbell, "Legislating Disability," in *Foucault and the Government of Disability*, ed. Shelley Tremain (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 122–24.

⁸ *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, article: "Disability: Definitions, Models, Experience," <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/disability/>>, accessed 8 December 2013.

If we take physical impairment as the only (or main) criterion of disability, the category becomes so large that it potentially encompasses everyone. The insistence on treating disability as the exceptional manifestation of the irregular betrays our tendency to dismiss the range of human variation. And we can suspect that we do so in order to protect ourselves from the recognition of our vulnerability. All these efforts to narrate, define, and patrol the realm of ability/disability speak to, as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues, the unavoidable conflation of disability and humanity: “[An] aspect of subject formation that disability confirms is that identity is always in transition. Disability reminds us that the body is, as Denise Riley asserts, ‘an unsteady mark, scarred in its long decay.’”⁹ We are born dependent, and most of us will die dependent; most of our lives are bounded by a dependence upon someone or some community. With (if we are unlucky) serious illness or (if we are lucky) simple aging, we will all be “disabled” at some time. From that standpoint, to insist on “abled/disabled” is to refuse to acknowledge one’s own embodied and mortal condition. As Judith Butler notes: “In a sense, to be a body is to be given over to others, even as a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own.’”¹⁰ And the consequences are serious. On the individual level, to maintain this divide is to make oneself vulnerable to one’s own narratives when disability comes, as it will. On a societal level, to insist on the importance of individualism and independence is to maintain an unsustainable fantasy in the face of an interdependent and vulnerable world.

If these fantasy realms operate by disavowing their status as fantasy, perhaps the realm of conscious fantasy may provide an antidote, or at least an alternate set of narratives. Butler, in the essay noted above, argues for fantasy’s potential as a catalyst for social change:

The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.¹¹

More specifically, Jane Stemp’s analysis of disability in fantasy and science fiction rightly notes the potential that medievalist literature holds for undoing the fantasies of ableism: “a motif from (medieval) history is the prevalence of disabilities, acquired through war and other hazards, which are nothing

⁹ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory,” *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* 14:3 (2002): 7.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

¹¹ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 29.

remarkable.”¹² But if in medievalist literature disability is, if not portrayed as the norm, at least presented as more frequent than in contemporary settings, Stemp cautions against viewing disability’s “unremarkable presence” as sufficient critique unto itself:

Fantasy is beset with traps for the writer, particularly the “magical cure,” a trap that springs from their desire to “nod to the mythical, perfect archetypes” while “science fiction writers, however willing to cast a satirical eye on earlier notions of ‘progress’, seem reluctant to abandon the hope that a perfected medical system will yet cure all the ills of the world.”¹³

The ambivalence betrays an ethical dilemma: what should be done with disability? More pointedly, what do disabled people want? Do they want a cure or do they want to be seen differently? The fantasy realm is not just a representation or distortion of reality; it has become a part of it. When a computer-generated commercial of Christopher Reeve walking appeared during the 2000 Super Bowl, some viewers assumed that Reeve had overcome paraplegia, and though the stated intention was to raise awareness and give hope, many people with congenital and acquired disabilities were not pleased. While Reeve was pushing for a cure (notably to allow stem-cell research in the US), others did not ask for a cure, but for societal change.

Even if the magical- or medical-cure trope is not present, often there is the “offer of choice” (the disabled character has a chance to become “able,” an offer that if accepted, reinforces ableist fantasy, and if rejected, is usually rejected in a sacrificial gesture, leaving the disabled in the position of martyr). A third possibility, of overall ideological change, is thus missing. The disability must either be corrected by a magical act (or a technological breakthrough) or, if it is accepted, it must serve a greater good (the disabled veteran reminds us of the sacrifice she endured to defend our freedom). That one could be fully *oneself* (thus, not marked by a lack) even though one is disabled seems incomprehensible. How could one be “normal” if one is disabled? Does not the call for a societal change face a logical contradiction built in the very semantic of “normality” and “disability”? Stemp finds the cause of these limiting tropes in the escapist nature of fantasy and science fiction itself: “writers are reluctant to alter reality in the presence of disability without having the disability itself changed.”¹⁴ Her extensive survey

¹² Jane Stemp, “Devices and Desires: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Disability in Literature for Young People,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 21:1 (Winter 2004): 3.

¹³ Stemp, “Devices and Desires,” 9.

¹⁴ Stemp, “Devices and Desires,” 10.

of science fiction and fantasy literature finds only rare exceptions to these tropes.

A Game of Thrones, the first volume of George R. R. Martin's enormous epic fantasy *A Song of Ice and Fire*, appeared in 1996. The sheer number of major characters that are or become disabled is unusual:¹⁵ Bran Stark is no sooner introduced than he is pushed out of a tower, a fall that shatters his spine and his dreams of becoming a knight. Hodor, his servant, is physically powerful but unable to say anything other than his name. Tyrion Lannister was born a dwarf and is additionally mutilated during an early battle, losing his nose.¹⁶ Varys, the eunuch, is the victim of a brutal castration. Jaime Lannister has his sword hand cut off as retribution. Arya Stark, during her apprenticeship at the temple of the Many-Faced God, faces a gamut of possible "disabilities": as punishment/education for her taking it upon herself to deal out death she is deprived of her sight, and her training promises more to come:

We took your eyes and gave them back. Next we will take your ears, and you will walk in silence. You will give us your legs and crawl. You will be no one's daughter, no one's wife, no one's mother. Your name will be a lie, and the very face you wear will not be your own.¹⁷

With an epic of this scope and this many intermingled story lines, one that is still unfinished after five massive volumes, any argument about the role and purpose of a specific character is perilous. With that in mind, however, we can at least begin to discuss the effects of the *number* of disabled characters, followed by an analysis of two characters notable for their challenges to narratives of disability.

Martin is famous for shocking and horrifying his readers with swift and brutal reversals of fortune: Jaime Lannister's attempted murder of Bran, Joffrey Lannister's condemnation of Ned Stark, the notorious "Red Wedding" massacre by the Freys. These events serve their pragmatic purpose in keeping the plot unpredictable; they also highlight the vulnerability of

¹⁵ The count of the disabled grows if we expand it to consider important, but not major characters: The disfigured "Hound," Sandor Clegane, Myrcella Lannister, who loses an ear while abducted, and Davos Seaworth, whose hand is mutilated as a punishment for smuggling.

¹⁶ Martin's writing of Tyrion as noseless post-battle led to an interesting problem for the creators of the HBO series. They could not include a lack of nose in a popular and innately moral character, because that particular disability had already been coded as emblematic of evil in the *Harry Potter* series, in the figure of Voldemort. Tyrion, in the series, appears with a scar across his face instead.

¹⁷ George R. R. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 837.

everybody in the refusal to spare characters usually protected from disabling violence in most fantasy series (romantic pairs, children, paragons of virtue). A brief comparison with Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy should suffice: after a three-volume quest through battles, monster-filled mines, haunted marshes, caves of giant spiders, and Mordor itself, the body count for the Nine Walkers stands at one, a ludicrous number given the circumstances, and the only disabled character is Frodo, who loses a ring finger. Martin thus strips the buffer of fantasy by making his world just as arbitrary and dangerous as our own. Moreover, the variety of disabilities found in *A Song of Ice and Fire* forces the reader to confront the multifaceted nature of disability: disability as innate condition (such as Tyrion's dwarfism or Hodor's speech impediment¹⁸), where the character is, from birth, subject to ableist discourse; or disability as sudden loss, as in the case of Bran or Jaime, where Martin at a swoop deprives them of the ability upon which their identity hinges: climbing in Bran's case, and swordplay in Jaime's. The reader is surrounded by the disabled as if by a ring of mirrors, in which she is forced to recognize herself as a potentially disabled being or lose the experience of textual immersion altogether. Once in this position, she is able to experience the ways these characters refuse to conform to the conventional tropes surrounding disability and launch an implicit challenge to ableist normative standards.

Jaime Lannister's initial attack on the seven-year-old Bran would seem to mark him as a sociopath; as the volumes unfold, he is revealed as an example of Dantean misplaced love: his passion for his sister Cersei (and the homophone is not accidental) overrides any other ethical or emotional consideration, and as we see the cost of his infatuation with her and her casual use of that infatuation, it becomes difficult to see Jaime as an uncomplicated villain. Initially, Jaime appears first and foremost as a warrior and lover; he is truly himself when in battle or bed with Cersei. His physical appearance (tall and handsome) belies his moral character: arrogant, brutal, and ruthless. He is quite convinced that "there are no men like me, there's only me."¹⁹ His eventual mutilation, the loss of his sword hand, reduces him

¹⁸ Hodor is potentially one of the most interesting of the disabled characters in Martin's epic. He is a physical giant of immense strength, but only responds to the speech of others by saying his own name, "Hodor," with various, situationally appropriate resonances. Martin, however, gives no clear sign that he is innately mentally impaired; the other characters infer that from his speech, as do Martin's readers. However, Hodor seems to understand language perfectly, and has the vocal ability to produce sounds, raising the question of what his choice to continually produce and reproduce his name means in a text concerned with the effects of ableist discourse and its refusal of the individual in favor of the stereotype.

¹⁹ George R. R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 791.

to the most abject form of dependency, for he had no abilities other than his fighting skills. His desperate attempt to regain that skill with his remaining hand (and the failure of that attempt) frame him as a cripple deserving of our pity, not so much because of his physical handicap but because of his incapacity to shape another existence for himself. Disability, for Jaime, is punishment; it is a castration, the loss of his masculinity. His subsequent office as the (one-handed) Hand of the King is savagely cruel; he can no longer be a protector, and the work of the Hand (the scheming, negotiating, bargaining, and ruthless annihilation of enemies) proves to be beyond his abilities. At this point in the epic, however, Jaime is still existing in a limbo where he thinks in terms of his lost abilities; he is interesting, not because of his conformity to typical disability narratives, but because Martin has thus far refused any such consolatory tropes.

Bran and Tyrion are the most interesting of the disabled characters: the former, because of Martin's deliberate refusal of sentimentalism in the depiction of a disabled child; the latter because Tyrion, arguably the most complex and well-crafted of Martin's creations, actually points up the "crippled" and vulnerable nature of the ableist fantasy, rather than being thwarted by physical disability.

Bran's narrative fairly screams for a sticky-sweet Dickensian rendering: a jolly scamp of a seven-year-old boy, whose dreams of chivalry are cut short by a truly brutal attempted murder: upon accidentally viewing Jaime and Cersei's incestuous coupling in a high tower, Bran is picked up from the windowsill and then hurled down by Jaime, a fall that shatters his spine and leaves him in a coma for weeks. He lives and recovers, only to learn that he is paralyzed from the waist down, and can only move around with the help of Hodor. While bedridden, however, Bran discovers that he has the ability to occupy the bodies of other beings. Bran's paralysis allows him, paradoxically, to move more freely: to cross two borders, the first one, of a shamanistic nature, between humans and animals, the second of a metaphysical nature between mind and body. While comatose, his direwolf saves him from attempted murder. A three-eyed crow he encounters in a dream tells him that it will teach him how to fly. From then on, he is the winged wolf. Most often, the sight of disabled children is a disturbing one; it is a display of an injustice and causes a deep sorrow. The character of Bran, however, is the opposite of a sweetly moral Victorian victim; he initially rages against his limitations, and when he finally learns to inhabit other bodies and make them move to his will, he displays no compunction whatsoever about using these unwilling prosthetics:

After they were gone, he slipped inside Hodor's skin and followed them. The big stable boy no longer fought him as he had the first

time, back in the lake tower during the storm. Like a dog that has had all the fight whipped out of him, Hodor would curl up and hide whenever Bran reached out to him. His hiding place was deep inside, a pit where even Bran could not touch him. *No one wants to hurt you, Hodor*, he said silently to the child-man whose flesh he'd taken. *I just want to be strong again. I'll give it back, the way I always do.*²⁰

A body is akin to a glove or a puppet; it is meant to be animated from within (the choice of the word “flesh” stresses internality and materiality) while remaining indifferent to the one who inhabits it. Because he has overcome at least in part his dependence on his own body, Bran has overcome his disability. Embodiment appears then not only as the condition of particular disabilities but as *the* disability. Yet, this freeing from the demands of the body is not a Platonic elevation toward the intelligible realm. Far from turning him into a vindicated victim, the new powers he acquires are not a compensation for his lost innocence; on the contrary, Bran becomes the abuser of the more disabled, and his apology to Hodor reeks of self-serving insincerity; Hodor has simply become a resource.

A shaman's soul is said to travel through the animal and the human world, inhabiting different bodies, at times an eagle, at times a wolf, perceiving the world with acute senses. But Bran is a shamanistic figure in yet another sense: he inhabits different personae. He is in turn a child victim, a cripple, a magical being endowed with supernatural powers, and an abuser. He should be pitied for his disability and feared for his powers. When he first appears in the saga, his childish innocence starkly contrasts with the incestuous sexual act committed before him by Jaime and his twin sister Cersei. Yet, he ends up as the abusive master of an unwilling servant. In this sense, Bran has the same moral ambiguity as most other characters in the epic – his youth does not constitute an exception. Bran becomes “normal” by his ability to escape the hero/victim dichotomy of disability fantasies and becomes simply another flawed opportunist of the epic's world.

The most prominent disabled character in *The Song of Ice and Fire* is arguably Tyrion Lannister. However, the significance of his case is not simply due to the fact that Martin grants him a prominent role in the development of the plot. His disability, dwarfism, marks him as the only major character who we know did not acquire his condition through an accident. While other characters *become* disabled, Tyrion *is* disabled; there is no time of his existence where he was otherwise than he is now. A congenital disability is more

²⁰ Martin, *A Dance with Dragons*, 584.

likely to constitute an identity than an acquired one. A congenital condition may not be experienced as a lack by the disabled person until it is called to their attention. Those who have always been little persons, deaf, or blind do not experience their condition as the result of a loss. It is the reaction to their appearance, one that often betrays the uneasiness of the able, that is the main factor to their identity as disabled. In our cultural imaginary, little people are freaks, social outcast, or objects of compassion.

Furthermore, dwarfism is not just a physical condition; it is a social role and a cultural metaphor.²¹ It occupies an important place not only in our cultural imaginary in general but in the medieval imagery in particular. Dwarfs belong to the world of European courts where, often as jesters, they occupy an ambiguous position. They are often perceived as servants of sort; yet they are granted a license to speak their mind that would be cause of severe punishment for anyone else (servant or nobleman). Their condition grants them protection and possibly even affection, but it also exposes them to abuse, sometimes simultaneously. Isabella d'Este, the Marchesa of Mantua, set aside part of her palace for her dwarfs, and in 1710 the Tsar Peter the Great allowed a dwarf couple to spend their wedding night in his bedchambers.²² Amusement and repulsion coincide in the figure of the dwarf. Martin, however, seems to use Tyrion more as a representation of the *Ice and Fire* world itself: an uneasy mix of Stark pessimistic idealism, Lannister cynical cunning, and Baratheon excess, Tyrion embodies the traits that lead to the downfall of each house's leaders, while his disaster-prone adventures invite a reading as a critique of the entire *Game of Thrones*.

Tyrion's disability is mitigated throughout the series: he is well-educated, and, as a Lannister, he has access to power and wealth. He also seems oddly unmoved by the disasters that surround him, and inevitably he both survives and manages to turn them to advantage: initially captured by Catelyn Stark and imprisoned, he evades execution by a "cunning plan"; captured by the mountain tribes, he manages to lead them back as Lannister mercenaries; and he survives his father's attempt to have him killed in battle, all with the same mocking insouciance. His real armor is his internalization both of ableist culture's exile of the disabled and its concomitant championing of

²¹ In Germanic and Scandinavian folklore, the dwarf is a type of fairy inhabiting mines and the interior of mountains.

²² As an instance of ambivalent attitude it should be noted that the Tsar's interest did not stem from humanitarian concern. Peter was fascinated by oddities and accidents of nature; he established a *Kunstkamera*, a cabinet of curiosities where deformed animal and human skeletons were preserved. As for Isabella, she viewed her dwarfs as she would have viewed her dogs: breeding them and giving their children as gifts to her friends.

individualism and independence: “Let them see that their words can cut you, and you’ll never be free of the mockery. If they want to give you a name, take it, make it your own. Then they can’t hurt you with it anymore.”²³ Since his disability is congenital Tyrion rationalizes his condition by associating it with the status of a bastard. The advice he gives to Jon Snow (widely believed to be Lord Eddard Stark’s bastard) and the assistance he offers to the paralyzed Bran (he designs a saddle so he can ride) stem from his sympathy for “bastards and broken things”:

Tyrion: “let me give you some advice, bastard. Never forget what you are. The rest of the world will not. Wear it like an armor, and it can never be used to hurt you.”

Jon: “What the hell do you know about being a bastard?”

Tyrion: “All dwarfs are bastards in their father’s eyes.”²⁴

His dwarfism makes him an expert and he sees his task as making Jon and Bran more independent individuals – something they can achieve only when they not only accept their condition but even embrace it. Yet, the support he can provide to others comes at a price, for it means that those who accept his wisdom must recognize themselves in him: their social condition is a form of disability. Furthermore, if the bastard is a cripple of sorts, the cripple is a bastard. The repeated identification of disability and bastardy in Tyrion’s case adds an oedipal depth to it: his father dislikes him not only for his deformity but also for the death of his mother during his birth. His condition is a punishment for a crime he committed simply by virtue of being born.

The development of Tyrion’s character in *Song of Ice and Fire* allows Martin to broach a theme that remains one of the most taboo topics in the popular perception of disability, namely, the sexuality of/with disabled people. Disabled people are often believed to be sexually and emotionally immature; the very word “disability” entails “limitation,” “diminishment”; it connotes features that are undesirable or even unattractive. As Siebers puts it, “The fusion between ability and sexuality appears to be foundational to the nature of humanity, so much so that any attempt to unfuse them is considered a threat to the human race itself.”²⁵ (Thus, various attempts to prevent sexual encounters between disabled people have been made in the name of eugenics.²⁶) But in the case of disability, as in many other instances,

²³ George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 185.

²⁴ Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 57.

²⁵ Siebers, “Disability Theory,” 142.

²⁶ Marsha Saxton reports that the little people community is divided on the issue of selective abortion. Most are incensed by the idea that a woman or a couple would chose to abort

sexuality heightens and crystallizes our ambivalence and contradictions. If the sexuality of disabled people is perceived as distasteful or as a threat to normalcy (as Siebers and Saxton suggest), intercourse between a disabled and an able person is also an object of fetishist fixation among the able. Amputees (acrotomophilia) and little people in particular have “devotees.” And of course, these forms of paraphilia are themselves perceived by the general public as pathological, while their psychiatric and legal classification remains to this day highly confused. Tyrion’s complex sexual and emotional life must be read against this background.

Medievalist fantasies are often dominated by scenes of war and sumptuous banquets. By definition, this life of danger and excess, of violence and orgy, fits able people (particularly men) and would seem to exclude disabled people. Yet, this is Tyrion’s world, and he has learned to excel in both areas. Indeed, his sexual appetite is often stressed, as he is often in the company of prostitutes and courtesans: women whose function is to provide sexual gratification without the bonds of emotional attachment. What is more, rather than reserve his sexual needs and exploits for his “private” life, he is quite explicit about them:

Gunter: “How would you like to die, Tyrion son of Tywin?”

Tyrion: “In my own bed, with a belly full of wine, and a maiden’s mouth around my cock, at the age of eighty.”²⁷

However, his casual attitude with prostitutes is multifaceted. Martin casts it against an oft-repeated narrative of Tyrion’s early life: his first love was for a common girl named Tysha whom he secretly married. When his father, Lord Tywin, learns of his marriage he orders Tyrion’s brother, Jaime, to make him believe that the young girl was a prostitute he had hired. To punish the whore who had presumed to marry a Lannister, Tywin devises a “lesson”: he forces Tyrion to watch his entire guard rape Tysha and finally has Tyrion himself do the same. Tyrion does not question his father, since he has already accepted the rhetoric that he, as a dwarf, is not capable of inspiring romantic love. This event becomes a kind of orthopedic trauma, a way for him to guard himself from any real emotional investment in others, though it is ultimately only partially successful. The later revelation from Jaime that Tysha

simply because the fetus would become dwarf; yet, “prospective parents who are carriers of the dwarfism gene, or are themselves dwarfs, who would readily welcome a dwarf child, might still elect to use the screening test to avoid the birth of a fetus identified with double dominance.” M. Saxton, “Disability Rights and Selective Abortion,” *The Disability Studies Reader* (2nd ed.), ed. Lennard Davis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 108.

²⁷ Martin, *A Game of Thrones*, 460.

was not a whore, and it was simply a sadistic trick of his father's to prevent him from marrying out of his class, is one that almost destroys Tyrion. Not because of his father's betrayal, but because the revelation means that the narratives he took as painful, but real, are not so; the possibility for community and mutual interdependence exists. Thus, Tyrion's sexual and emotional life is inextricably intertwined with his disabled condition. Making his sexual appetite and his predilection for prostitutes public is a way of taking agency in the formation of his identity: he actively defines himself before others label him; his active sexuality is meant to show to all that his dwarfism does not affect his virility in the least. At the same time, it is an essential component of his tormented relation to his father. By being openly known for his predilection, he continues insulting the family's name after his father refused to make him his heir on the ground that he would never allow Tyrion to make Castelry Rock his whorehouse. The oedipal conflict culminates with Tyrion's patricide when he discovers one of his favorite mistresses, Shae, in his father's bed:

Tywin: "You shot me."

Tyrion: "You always were quick to grasp a situation, my lord, that must be why you are the Hand of the king."

Tywin: "You, you are no ... no son of mine."

Tyrion: "Now that's where you're wrong, father. Why, I believe I'm you writ small."²⁸

Despite his rhetorical mastery and caustic humor, the patricide is not the answer; Tyrion remains prisoner of his father's manipulation with whom he identifies in the same moment he kills him. While he embarks on a quest to find Tysha, in an attempt to recapture the innocence and happiness his father had destroyed, he comes close to madness. As he crosses the sea to find Tysha, he cannot escape the visions of Tysha's gang rape and his own patricide. If the conflict with his father is synonymous with his fight against the dominant perception of his disability, Tyrion's only actual disability is his acceptance of ableist narrative as a way of moving through the world. Thus, paradoxically, Tyrion does become a figure of "the tortured conscience of man";²⁹ but this time, as a figure of the torture that results from accepting a normative ideology.

Martin's epic, cloaked in gold and wine, dragons and direwolves, "brings elsewhere home" by dismantling the clichés of disability, examining the costs

²⁸ George R. R. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 1073.

²⁹ A trope seen in films like *The Year of Living Dangerously*.

of ableist ideologies, and uncovering the fear of mortality and vulnerability that compels people to build a wall separating themselves from the disabled, and from their own fear, a strategy that only renders them inevitably more vulnerable. Because, as Martin warns us: “Fear cuts deeper than swords.”

The Ethical Movement of Daenerys Targaryen

Christopher Roman

George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* suggests that attaining power often involves utilizing a politics that does not answer to ethics. While in Westeros, the setting for much of Martin's saga – and most specifically while in the seat of power itself, the capital city, King's Landing – we see that power is wielded by the one who is most willing to be treacherous. Or, as the character Ser Jorah Mormont formulates it, those most willing to play “the game of thrones.” As philosopher Marcus Schulzke points out, “the War of the Five Kings follows the logic of the Machiavellian struggle for power and illustrates many of Machiavelli's most important lessons.”¹ The logic of this main battle in the books, called the “War of the Five Kings,” reduces the life of those who are not in power or fighting for power to a position of “bare life.” As ecologist Mick Smith argues, “the *bios politicos* cannot be simply a matter of an individual's capacity to survive or not: it is not reducible to bare life; rather it has to do with having the potential to initiate, participate in, and sustain politics as such.”² Smith's argument is prescient for the citizens of Westeros, who, caught in the power struggle between the Five Armies, are reduced to just such a state of survival. While the battle is going on in Westeros, Martin introduces us to another continent on the other side of what is called the Narrow Sea. On that continent, the case of another main character, Daenerys Targaryen, poses the problem of power *within* the tensions between political action and ethics. This article has two agendas: 1) to argue that Daenerys Targaryen connects ethics with politics as a way to

¹ Marcus Schulzke, “Playing the Game of Thrones: Three Lessons From Machiavelli,” in *Game of Thrones and Philosophy*, ed. Henry Jacoby (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012), 34.

² Mick Smith, *Against Ecological Sovereignty: Ethics, Biopolitics, and Saving the Natural World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 164.

make politics responsible to ethics and to widen the definition of politics beyond its role as solely a means to possess power, and 2) to fill a critical gap in analyzing Daenerys as one who can wield an ethical politics that questions the political action of the blood-lusting men of Westeros.

Before delving into the ethical and politics problems of George R. R. Martin's world, it is worth a short summary of his work so far. *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the story of competing, warring families, all of whom are trying to secure their claim to the Iron Throne in the capital city of Westeros, King's Landing. Daenerys Targaryen and her brother, Viserys, are the only survivors of the previous family that held power. They are exiled across the Narrow Sea, and, as their story begins, they are seeking an army in order to invade Westeros and reclaim the throne. Martin follows the competing families – the Starks, the Baratheons, the Lannisters, and the Targaryens – weaving them in and out of various plots and schemes that span five volumes so far.

This article suggests that Daenerys' ethics evolves throughout the four books in which she appears. The evolving ethics is revealed in a search for justice within the structures of politics. As Daenerys argues in Book III, "why do the gods make kings and queens, if not to protect the ones who can't protect themselves? [...] Justice ... that's what kings are for."³ In attempting to invent a new kind of queenship unseen in the history of Westeros, Daenerys must make politics answerable to ethics. It is important to contrast her ethical *invention* with the political quagmire existent in Westeros itself. If Martin is offering up a critique of the "medieval" in the continuous battles, violence, brutality, and betrayal in Westeros, then coming from the east, Daenerys is figured as a kind of "renaissance," bringing enlightenment and a new sense of ethical inclusion that the men locked in continual battle overlook.

Martin's medievalism fits with Tison Pugh's and Angela Weisl's recent definition of medievalism as a "comment on the artist's contemporary sociocultural milieu."⁴ I want to account for Daenerys' ethical evolution by suggesting that the interest in her character is her wrestling with how to make ethics and politics responsible to one another, as well as how these ethical and political poles can work with the people, those who make up the social body. The sometimes frustrating, albeit purposeful, narrative device of the Narrow Sea – an oceanic fissure that keeps Daenerys from Westeros – highlights the ethical tension between a promise of a home she has never known and a sense of the duty of queenship linked to an idealized Iron Throne and to the people around her. These competing ethical and political

³ George R. R. Martin, *A Storm of Swords* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 374.

⁴ Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

claims need to be resolved not in terms of siding with one or the other but by outwitting them. As philosopher Slavoj Žižek comments in his reading of Hegelian ethics at the end of *The Plague of Fantasies*:

the revolutionary attempts which endeavor to impose on the world their vision, based on their belief in the fundamental goodness and rationality of humankind, not only fail to take into account the essential frailty and meanness of human nature, they themselves unleash the powerful force of an unheard-of destructiveness.⁵

Daenerys and her attempts at liberation of the various Free Cities while she is in exile, as well as her care for her unpredictable dragons, mirror Žižek's account of this problem of pure revolution.

To account for Daenerys' ethical evolution, consider her plight in the first book, *A Game of Thrones*. While in exile with her brother, Viserys, she is sold by her brother to Khal Drogo, who promises to provide an army of Dothraki in order for Viserys to reclaim the Iron Throne in Westeros. The Dothraki are a nomadic people, and the horse is the center of their culture. They are a culture of soldiers. Throughout the initial chapters Martin emphasizes her adaptation to Dothraki culture. While her brother Viserys complains of the Dothraki as "savages"⁶ and continually demands his golden crown, Daenerys refuses to force the Dothraki. Her brother's refusal to respect the Dothraki – marked by his wearing of unwieldy clothing in the desert heat and a lack of respect for the Dothraki's sacred space – leads to his death. His death subsequently frees Daenerys to develop as a leader.

Daenerys forms a hybrid ethics early on – partly based in her experience (of being sold, being a young woman, being an exile) and partly based in her adopted Dothraki culture. She takes on Dothraki clothing, Dothraki respect for the horse, and initially Dothraki values. In the attack of the city, Lhazereen, though, there is a sudden shift. Daenerys finds her ethical voice. When she initially enters the conquered city she decides to "harden her heart" (*A Game*, 667) to the pain and suffering around her in order to conform to the terms of Dothraki victory. But when she comes upon Eroeh, a citizen of Lhazereen, being serially raped, she stops one of Khal Drogo's high-ranking sergeants, Khal Jhoqo, and his men from continuing. "I want no rape," Daenerys declares (*A Game*, 668). It is in this moment that she begins to build her ethical framework. If up to this point in Book One Daenerys is making decisions to ensure her own survival, such as allowing the punish-

⁵ Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 302.

⁶ George R. R. Martin, *A Game of Thrones* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 307.

ment of her brother when he disrespects her in front of the Dothraki, she is now concerned with the other, the victim, which marks her ethics in the future books.

The problem initially for Daenerys is that her ability to enact power is on behalf of another. Her power is not hers alone. When she orders “no rape,” her power comes from Khal Drogo. It is indicative of how flimsy this power is as each member of the khal, or tribe, reminds her that if Drogo dies, she will have no power. The people will (and do) leave to follow the next male leader.

The tension between ethics and politics reveals itself with the refugee Mirri Maz Duur. The greater khal is suspicious of Duur since her city has just been pillaged and her people slaughtered and raped. Yet, Duur promises to help heal Khal Drogo as he suffers from a poisoned wound. Daenerys trusts her with both Khal Drogo’s healing and the birth of their son. Both die. Here is a crisis in the tension between ethics and politics. If she mistrusts someone who is willing to offer her help, she betrays her ethics; if she spurns Duur, pure politics wins in reinforcing that the stranger cannot be trusted. Unfortunately, her ethical decision to open herself to the victim turns tragic. Daenerys finds herself khaleesi, or female leader of the Dothraki, but only to those who the greater khal want to leave behind. She is left with the women, the children, and the old. Rather than remove ethics from her decision-making, she opens herself further. It is in this moment that her ethics expands to care for all those who are politically weak. Yet, her role as khaleesi does not begin untainted; she initiates this role in political terms by executing Duur. This killing is political revenge; as an ethical path it is unsustainable.

Although the role of khaleesi is a starting point, Daenerys cannot remain in this space; she begins to experiment with a political response answerable to ethics as she begins on her path of liberation. First, however, she must grapple with the foundational power bound up with the word. The politics of the word is a problem for women in Westeros. In the history of Westeros there is no history involving a queen. There is always a king. In the case of Cersei Lannister, wife of the first king we meet in the saga, Robert Baratheon, the basis of her power is in another’s name (her son, her father, her husband). In other words, she can never frame her decrees from within her own power. She is never named ruler, although she is eventually punished as one when King’s Landing is threatened in later books. This lack of queenly role models in Westeros is an opportunity for Daenerys.

As I have mentioned, Daenerys’s order of “no rape” reveals the ethical foundation of future actions – a capacious politics that is responsive to the ethical claims of the citizenry. While in Westeros, the reader does not see kings interacting with the masses except to exploit, punish, or brutalize

them. Daenerys' ethical problems are worsened by her lack of economic power to back up her politico-ethical claims. She is haunted by an ideal home and reclamation of a throne she has never truly known, and, thus, her initial decisions are based on ways to economically support that reclamation. However, the processes of truth that would support the reclamation of the Iron Throne are nonexistent. In the beginning the only source of information regarding her home is her brother's stories of a past that even he was not completely privy to. His partial knowledge is Daenerys' link to what she considers her rightful throne. Because of her brother's desires, each of her decisions, such as to buy the Unsullied slaves, a group of slaves who have been brainwashed through a regiment of poison berries to follow every command, is to take back that idealized throne. This is a retread of the problem in relation to Khal Drogo; she continually acts and decides through someone else's base of political desires.

Keeping one's word in Martin's world illustrates the problem of Hobbesian contracts. If in a Hobbesian world the foundation of a society is that of the contract, any relationship will be bound by that contract. However, what if the contract made does not serve one's best interest? The basis for making a contract is that the contract protects one from unpredictability and serves one's best interest. But what keeps the subject from going back on his word? Or why keep the contract at all if one's neck is always on the line? How does one balance duty with self-interest?⁷ An example of the problem of the contract is the plight of Eddard Stark, a main character of the first volume, *A Game of Thrones*. Keeping his word does not allow him mercy: the opening chapter has him beheading a man who has luckily escaped the White Walkers, a group of zombies who live in the frozen North. Although the White Walkers have driven him from the Wall, which protects Westeros from the White Walkers, his abandonment of the Wall is an executable offense. The contractual word does not allow Eddard Stark to turn down King Robert Baratheon's offer to be the Hand of the King, either. Keeping one's word is the root of what ultimately kills him. It is this same kind of keeping one's word that troubles Daenerys. How does one fulfill obligations to the people she frees *and* return to Westeros and rule from what she considers her "rightful" throne?

The short answer to this question for now is that she cannot. For Daenerys her ethical choice of freeing the people and her political desire to return to Westeros to reclaim the Iron Throne represents what medievalist M. V. Dougherty outlines as a common moral debate in medieval moral theory:

⁷ Greg Littman, "Maester Hobbes Goes to King's Landing," in *Game of Thrones and Philosophy*, ed. Henry Jacoby (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012), 16.

“an agent discovers equally compelling moral reasons to perform and to desist from an action, and these compelling reasons cannot be voided.”⁸ On the one hand, Daenerys is compelled to return to Westeros because of a sense of reclaiming what is her right; not to do so would betray her family’s history. On the other hand, in the process of building an army for just such a purpose, she frees the slaves from unjust treatment; not to free them would violate her sense of justice. The slaves then become part of her governmental structure. In continually seeking the liberation of unjustly treated peoples, her return to Westeros seems less and less likely. The symbolic fissure of the Narrow Sea keeps her away, keeps her on the edge of this disaster of the Word.

Daenerys’ dealings with the problem of the Word, in her case the promise to reclaim the Iron Throne, is also tangled with the problem of family. After the death of her brother, Daenerys’ connection to *human* family is sundered, but family still exists in connection with her mothering of the dragons. The source of her political and inspirational power is the people’s awe of and desire for her dragons, which she hatched in Khal Drogo’s funeral pyre. The dragons are the symbol of her family sigil, or emblem, and her insistence on the dragons as part of her family reveals a capacious quality to her ethics – the care for the other is not just a care for the human, it also includes the non-human and indicates, again, that her ethics as queen must eclipse that of a king with narrow political ambitions. In this way, her care for the horse, as evidenced in the value system of the Dothraki, takes new shape. The Dothraki worshipped and respected the horse, but, in times of distress, it could be eaten. The dragons are *family*, and in many ways, are agents with the concerns of citizens. The obligation between her people and her dragons – both of whom figure her as mother – come to a head when the most beloved dragon, Drogon, kills a girl in the fields in the early chapters of the latest volume, *A Dance with Dragons*. To keep her people safe (ethics), the dragons are kept in a dungeon (politics) that angers them.

Ethics, then, cannot stand still. As much as Daenerys is committed to the other – the victims, the slaves, the women, the dragons, the dead – the people suffer when there is not enough to eat, and refugees leave the cities she has liberated to come to Meereen. Daenerys must marry a scheming, and wealthy, merchant, Hizdahr, in order to guarantee some peace in Meereen, a city she liberated and decided to rule, but now is collapsing into anarchy without her ability to *economically* solve problems. This marriage compromise comes at a price. The fighting pits and Yunkai’i slave tents return, a

⁸ M. V. Dougherty, *Moral Dilemmas in Medieval Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4.

sight that disgusts her. In the case of her political marriage, she has leaned too far toward a pure political pole.

Contrasting the politics of Westeros with that of Daenerys' actions reveals: 1) an ethics that is immovable as that found in the contract or the Word is unethical, in that no party receives justice; 2) an open ethics is a process in the response for justice; and 3) sometimes that process fails. Since ethics is never stable, it will always be a risk. Ethics forces Daenerys to be responsible and vulnerable. In freeing the cities of Astapor and Yunkai and Meereen, Daenerys is forging a space for the victim to speak. She runs into problems in that her liberation is for the good, but the *ideal* of liberation is met with the reality of the people; in her rush towards Westeros, Daenerys creates an unintended vacuum instead of an ethical politics.

Martin poses a number of ethico-political problems to disentangle by the end of *A Dance with Dragons*. Daenerys is unable to forge community because although she has set a space for ethics to flourish, she has not solved the problem of a truth process. She needs to examine each event as a truth process, in order to develop the *ethics* of Astapor, the *ethics* of Yunkai, the *ethics* of the dragons, etc. As well, she has not ensured systemic changes to the plight of the people. When the fighting pits are reopened, Hizdahr tells her that the slaughtered beasts are used in the soup for the poor. Even though great bloodshed and vulgar death are on show, the brutality is used for charity; charity in Hizdahr's working, though, is a political veneer. It is business as usual. The oppression that actually affects the very conditions of the poor is not removed. Daenerys is taken aback when she finds out that people are selling themselves back into slavery because their lot has gotten worse since she began her leadership.

For Žižek, the way to avoid the implosion that is revolutionary ethics is:

characterized by the radical ambiguity of the subject's impossible relationship to the Thing – we derive energy from it, but if we approach it too closely its lethal attraction will swallow us up ... the postmodernist subject must learn the artifice of surviving the experience of a radical limit, of circulating around the lethal abyss without being swallowed by it.⁹

As Daenerys, a postmodern subject wielding dragons and feminist politics, notes, she will not answer savagery with savagery, but with mercy. She must draw power from her Iron Throne without succumbing to its economic demands. Her efforts need to be with the people. In the scenes in which she

⁹ Žižek, *A Plague*, 310.

hears the requests of the people, she attempts a finer truth process and ethics of justice. She makes politics respond to ethics.

For example, a slaveowner, Grazdan zo Galare, had owned a seamstress slave who was so good he had her teach a number of his other slaves. Now that the slaves are free, they open a shop selling the goods they make. He wants a cut of their business, since, he claims, he taught them everything they know. When Daenerys asks him what the name of the original slave is, he is unable to remember her name. Daenerys decides that since he did not teach the seamstresses their skill, he has no claim. On top of that, he will donate the best loom he can find to the business in the slave's memory. These women are freed of his tyranny and given the means of better production – the oppressor/slave relationship has truly been short-circuited.¹⁰ The question for Daenerys, then, is how to enact this practice on a wider scale.

Her ethics will only work on this situational level. She must meet each event as it produces truth; otherwise, she is playing politics with oppressors. A desire for a politics based in Forms – in other words the hard and fast law, contract, or word – falters when met with an event that demands ethical responsibility. Daenerys realizes this when she sees the refugees from Astapor and the uprising of the Yanqui'i. She has enslaved herself to the idea of the Iron Throne; even though she has liberated the oppressed, she must now enact ethical queenship.

¹⁰ George R. R. Martin, *A Dance with Dragons* (New York: Bantam Books, 2011), 41–42.

What If the Giants Returned to Albion for Vengeance? Crusade and the Mythic Other in the *Knights of the Nine* Expansion to *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*

Jason Pitruzzello

The island was at that time called Albion; it had no inhabitants save for a few giants. The choice position of this pleasant land, its numerous rivers, good for fishing, and its woods led Brutus and his companions to want to settle there. After exploring its various territories and driving off to mountain caves any giants they came upon, they portioned out the land, at their leader's invitation, and began to till the fields and build homes so that, in a short time, the country appeared to have been occupied for many years. They called the land Britain and its people Britons, after Brutus himself. He wanted to be remembered for ever for giving them his name. For this reason the language of his people, previously known as Trojan or "crooked Greek", was henceforth called British. Corineus followed his leader's example by similarly calling the area of the kingdom allotted to him Corineia and his people Corineians, after himself. He could have had his pick of the provinces before any other settler, but preferred the region now called Cornwall, either after Britain's horn or through a corruption of the name Corineia. He loved to fight giants, and there were more of them to be found there than in any of the districts divided amongst his companions. One of these Cornish giants was a monster called Goemagog, twelve cubits tall and so strong that he could loosen and uproot an oak tree as if it were a twig of hazel. One day when Brutus was holding a feast

for the gods at the port where he had landed, Goemagog arrived with twenty giants and inflicted terrible carnage on the Britons. Eventually, as more Britons flocked to their aid, they beat the giants and killed them all except Goemagog. Brutus had ordered that his life be spared because he wanted to see him wrestle with Corineus, who was always most eager to fight giants.¹

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* devotes considerable time to the exploits of Brutus and his people as they journey to the island of Albion. Wars are fought, treacheries are uncovered, and deeds of courage are undertaken in the best traditions of medieval historiography; yet, the conquest of the island itself is only briefly covered in the narrative above. In such a short passage, however, Geoffrey engages in mythopoeia that resonates both with his medieval successors and with scholars of imperialism and colonialism today. While Ireland is often called England's first colony, Geoffrey gives the reader a mythic story that makes England itself an object of colonization. In a short passage, he describes a foreign group of people arriving, exploiting the economic resources of the land, and killing or subduing the indigenous people. The giants of Albion are a mythic portrayal of the Other that could easily be transferred to any of a hundred stories about the subjugation of a people in a foreign land. The triumphant nature of the entire first book of Geoffrey's history reinforces the positive nature of this particular passage; the founding of Britain, a historically inevitable process in the context of this narrative, was a positive event. Fighting the giants is a mark of honor and a test of strength, even if it means that they must be driven away to live in caves, killed in combat, or kept alive for the sport of Corineus.

But medieval literature is never simple, and even such an insignificant part of Geoffrey's narrative carries with it some cultural and literary consequences for later medieval writers. In English literature, to say nothing of other medieval literary traditions, the giants appear again and again. As monsters, they are convenient villains against which heroes can strive. The story of the Mont Saint-Michel giant faced by Arthur and his companions in Malory is but one of many such encounters with the mythic Other throughout the Middle Ages:

Thenne came to hym an husbond man of the cuntry and told hym how there was in the countre of Constantyn besyde Bretayne a grete gyaunt whiche hadde slayne murdered and deuoured moche peple

¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De Gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae)*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 455–73.

of the countreye and had ben susteyned seuen yere with the children of the comyns of that land / in soo moche that alle the children ben alle slayne and destroyed / and now late he hath taken the duchesse of Bretayne as she rode by with her meyne / and hath ledde her to his lodgyng which is in a montayne for to rauysshe and lye by her to her lyues ende / and many people folowed her moo than / but alle they myghte not rescowe her / but they lefte he shrykyng and cryenge lamentably / wherfore I suppose than he hath slayn her in fulfyllinge his fowle lust of lechery / She was wyf vnto thy Cosyn syre Howel / whome we calle ful nyhe of thy blood / Now as thow a ryghtful kyng haue pyte on this lady / and reuenge vs al as thow arte a noble conquerour.²

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has already done an extensive treatment of both monsters and giants in medieval literature that goes far beyond my aims here, but for this particular discussion I want to emphasize his theory that the monster “Dwells at the Gates of Difference”: “The exaggeration of cultural difference into monstrous aberration is familiar enough. The most famous distortion occurs in the Bible, where the aboriginal inhabitants of Canaan are envisioned as menacing giants to justify Hebrew colonization of the Promised Land.”³ The giants are the Other, violators of taboos, and must be eliminated, whether they appear in Canaan, Brittany, or Albion.

Yet, they are not always just villains that require attack; no less a poet than the Pearl/Gawain Poet taps into the anxiety surrounding the mythic Other in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. While the poem is focused on Arthur and his knights, the poet frames the story with a brief recitation of the story of Brutus:

Hit watz Ennias þe athel, and his highe kynde,
 Þat sipen depreed prouinces, and patrounes bicom
 Welneze of al þe wele in þe west iles.
 Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyþe,
 With gret bobbaunce þat burze he biges vpon fyrst,
 And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
 Tirius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
 Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,
 And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus

² Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, ed. William Caxton and Heinrich Oskar Sommer (London: David Nutt, 1889), 167.

³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture: Seven Theses,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffery Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7.

On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez
wyth wyne [...].⁴

In and of itself, this is just an establishment of *auctoritas*; but when the Green Knight is described as “Half etayn” in the context of the story of Brutus, the cleverness of the Pearl/Gawain Poet comes to the fore.⁵ The Green Knight represents many things to medieval English readers; however, the mystery surrounding him is increased with the tantalizing possibility that he may be a relic of the mythic past, a past that should have died with Goemagog and his fellow giants. Geoffrey’s giants thus fulfill a secondary purpose as monsters theorized by Cohen: “The Monster Always Escapes.” He points out that:

No matter how many times Arthur killed the ogre of Mount Saint Michael, the monster reappeared in another heroic chronicle[...]. No monster tastes death but once. The anxiety that condenses like a green vapor into the form of a vampire can be dispersed temporarily, but the revenant by definition returns.⁶

While the mystery of the Green Knight is solved in Gawain’s adventure, and the Green Knight has not come to confront Arthur and his knights in violence, the possibility that the giants might come back in force is a quiet part of the medieval literary tradition that follows the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The giant as Other must be dealt with whenever it is found, lest it imperil the current socio-political paradigm. The giant, in all its forms, is not only a target of imperialism, but also a threat to the status quo when it appears after the project of colonialism has been completed. But what if the giants returned to Albion? And what if vengeance was on their mind? This is the central question that occupies the narrative of *The Knights of the Nine* expansion to the best-selling game *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, developed by Bethesda Game Studios. *The Knights of the Nine* is medievalism in all the obvious ways we have come to expect from video-game culture: sword-wielding heroes, spell-casting mages, and guilds that represent wealthy financial interests. There are even cathedrals with beautiful stained-glass windows, depicting the saints of the people’s faith. Yet, all of these medieval elements are window dressing when compared to the narrative presented in *The Knights of the Nine* expansion. In the expansion’s story, the original inhabitants of Cyrodiil, the setting’s equivalent of giants, have returned, led

⁴ Anonymous, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. R. R. Tolkien and E. V. Gordon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 1–15.

⁵ Tolkien, *Sir Gawain*, 140.

⁶ Cohen, “Monster Culture,” 4–5.

by Umaril the Unfeathered. Their goal is to exterminate or forcibly remove the people currently living in Cyrodiil and reclaim their ancient land. In the process of doing so, they defile cathedrals, kill clergy, and interfere with pilgrimages. They make no secret of their hatred for the faith of Cyrodiil's people. In the midst of this crisis, the player is called upon to do a very medieval thing: recreate a holy order to fight for the church and launch a crusade. The story is medieval, not because of swords and sorcery, but because of the very specific medieval actions the player is asked to undertake, and the paradigm under which those actions are taken. Welding together crusades, holy orders, and the return of the giants, *The Nights of the Nine* practices a complex kind of medievalism that goes further than simple appropriation of medieval iconography. While the story is not set in medieval England, and there is no explicit reference to any specific medieval text, the quiet anxieties about the giants found in Malory, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and the Pearl/Gawain Poet are made manifest in *The Knights of the Nine*. Geoffrey's giants have returned, and they want Albion back.

But the question facing medievalists would be why would Bethesda weld together crusades and the return of giants into a single narrative? There are a plethora of medieval games depicting more conventional crusades, both historical and fictional, and there is clearly a market for such medievalisms in the twenty-first century even in the wake of conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.⁷ Crusades, when directed at external targets such as the Holy Land, require some basic cultural and political components to be in play; since the setting of Tamriel and *The Elder Scrolls* does not have those political and cultural components, the only way to capitalize upon the popularity of crusade imagery and tropes is to direct that crusade against the only viable target: a mythic Other that has risen from the distant past to threaten the status quo. Profitability, not political correctness, dictates the target of this particular crusade, resulting in a crusade against a mythic Other, rather than against a fantasy analog for Saracens.

The setting of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *The Knights of the Nine* is a richly detailed fantasy realm that has evolved over the course of two decades since *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* was released in 1994, and thus requires an overview. The game is set in Tamriel, a continental landmass ruled by the Third Empire. The Third Empire has many political subdivisions, with vassal kingdoms and territories that mimic the political structure of the Holy Roman Empire; that the Empire rules over the entire continent of Tamriel does not change the fact that its vassal states still fight one another

⁷ Games such as *The King's Crusade*, depicting the struggle of Richard and Saladin, to say nothing of the appropriately titled *Crusader Kings II*, are but a small sample of the profitable medieval video-games utilizing crusades as a setting.

in warfare.⁸ The province of Cyrodiil, in which the story takes place, is the most important territory of the Empire, and also contains its capital. It has a predominately human population, even though the Empire contains humans, mer-folk (usually referred to as elves), and beast-folk in substantial numbers in other provinces. The humans who live in Cyrodiil, called Imperials by the other races of Tamriel, are not the indigenous people of Cyrodiil. They are descended from the Nedic people who settled in Cyrodiil roughly 4,000 years before the events depicted in *The Knights of the Nine* in what constitutes the mythic pre-history of the setting.⁹ Before their arrival, Cyrodiil was already inhabited by the Ayleids, mer-folk who had their own customs, government, and social structures. Ruins dating back to the time of the Ayleids dot the landscape of Cyrodiil and can be visited by players, giving the topography of Cyrodiil an *ubi sunt* motif. During a war 3,400 years ago, Saint Alessia led the humans to a final victory against the native Ayleids, conquering Cyrodiil and forming what came to be known as the First Cyrodiilic Empire.¹⁰ Alessia's war against the Ayleids fits the pattern of Brutus and his conquest of Albion and its giants. Umaril the Unfeathered was the greatest of the Ayleids, standing taller than a human and having great strength, in addition to his knowledge of forgotten or forbidden lore.¹¹ The hero Saint Pelinal Whitestrake, the original crusader whose relics the player later attempts to locate, defeated Umaril in personal combat at the Battle of White Gold Tower, but was martyred when the surviving Ayleids dismembered his body into eight pieces.¹² No significant number of Ayleids remained in Cyrodiil three centuries after the conquest, leaving the province populated almost entirely by humans. Cyrodiil is itself similar to Geoffrey's

⁸ A brief history of the Third Empire can be read in the appropriately named book, *A Brief History of the Empire*; however, there is a bibliographic dilemma when it comes to these types of sources in *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*. These "books" are virtual entities that exist only inside this game and several others published by Bethesda. Inside the game, they are virtual objects that can be manipulated and read just like a book; there are many libraries, both personal and professional, in the game that can be visited. There is even a virtual bookstore where players can purchase books or just browse and read them. This makes referencing information related to the game's narrative easy. Rather than just cite the game repeatedly, I will cite specific "books" where someone may verify the information. All of these references come from *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and *The Knights of the Nine* expansion itself. Those who do not wish to purchase the game may also read these books online at the UESP Elder Scrolls Wiki; however, in the interests of accuracy, all of the references in this article come from the content of the game and not the game's wiki.

⁹ *A Pocket Guide to the Empire: All the Eras of Man – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

¹⁰ *The Last King of the Ayleids – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

¹¹ *The Song of Pelinal–Volume 3: On His Enemy – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

¹² *The Song of Pelinal–Volume 7: On His Battle with Umaril and His Dismemberment – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

description of Albion; it has great forests in the Colovian Highlands, vast stretches of arable land along the shores of Nibenay Bay, and rivers abundant with fish in the West Weald.¹³

While the empire has more than one religion practiced within its borders, the official faith of the empire is the worship of the Nine Divines. It is a polytheistic faith in its theology, but it shares many structural similarities to the medieval Roman Catholic Church.¹⁴ Each major city in Cyrodiil has a large cathedral. There is a monastic tradition in the faith, with monasteries such as Weynon Priory enjoying the financial support of the Empire. The Nine Divines bless those who undertake pilgrimages, and players can undertake pilgrimages with tangible in-game effects. The church practices charity, regulates marriage, and has relics it considers holy. There are even saints and prophets who act as intermediaries for miracles provided by the Nine Divines; the climax of the main story of *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* involves one such miracle when Martin Septim, heir presumptive to the Empire, is filled with the power of Akatosh, chief deity of the Nine Divines, and saves the capital of the Empire from being laid waste by the forces of Oblivion. While there is no central Christ-like figure in the theology of this religion, Martin's martyrdom and subsequent destruction of the forces of Mehrunes Dagon mimics biblical miracles as well as medieval hagiography.

These details may seem unimportant, but they establish a number of important political considerations of the setting that are relevant to crusading. The Empire comprises the entirety of the known world, and the entirety of its own landmass. While there are other distant lands, they are shrouded in mystery and their people are virtually unknown to the people of Tamriel. There is no trade with the outside world; wars of conquest are not possible; and there is no land connection to the foreign lands, rendering the possibility of unknown enemies invading very remote. While Western Europe in the Middle Ages could finance and support crusades against religious enemies both across the Mediterranean and into the Baltic, such a thing is not even possible in *The Elder Scrolls*, due to geopolitical limitations that have been a part of the setting since 1994, when *The Elder Scrolls: Arena* was first published.

That being said, there are also cultural considerations that make crusades against external targets impractical. All sites for pilgrimage are within the borders of the Empire, so it is not possible for the Other, under normal circumstances, to interfere with these undertakings. Furthermore, the holy places of the faith all lie within the borders of the Empire. While Jerusalem

¹³ *Pocket Guide to the Empire, 3rd Edition: The Seat of Sundered Kings: Cyrodiil – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion.*

¹⁴ *The Ten Commands of the Nine Divines – The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion.*

might be in the hands of religious enemies, prompting a conflict with the Other, no such friction can occur in Tamriel, especially considering that the holiest place of the faith, White Gold Tower, also serves as the capital for the Empire. A further consideration is that the Empire has a policy of religious tolerance in *Oblivion*. With very few exceptions, citizens of the Empire are free to worship their preferred deity in any manner, provided it does not involve the sacrifice of sentient beings. Even during the Oblivion Crisis, worshipers of Mehrunes Dagon are only persecuted after they assassinate the Emperor and threaten to take over the entire world. And in *Oblivion*, there is no equivalent to armed conflicts with heretics and heresy. A crusade along the lines of the Albigensian Crusade is outside the cultural considerations of the setting. This creates a situation where the cultural conditions that might encourage crusades do not, in fact, exist. To create those conditions in the game would require radical changes to the setting, which would require the valuable time of artists, writers, and programmers. Furthermore, any serious treatment of an external crusade would require a substantial change in the political and cultural status quo of the setting, requiring a further commitment of game-development resources. Any external crusade or crusade against religious dissidents in *Oblivion* would require more resources than what would normally be budgeted as part of a project of this size. Whatever the content of such an expansion to the game, it must result in little or no change in the status quo. How, then, to create an exciting crusade that can result in the maintenance of the status quo? The giants must return to Albion, or, in this case, the Ayleids must return to Cyrodiil, threatening the status quo.

The narrative opens with an attack upon the cathedral in the city of Anvil. The attack not only leaves several members of the chapel's staff dead, but the attackers desecrate the altar to Dibella, one of the Nine Divines and the deity associated with love, with the body of a priest. Words were scrawled around the altar in an ancient language in the blood of the slain. This certainly brings to mind anti-Semitism and blood libel, with the position of the corpses and blood being a mockery of the religious rituals performed by the priests in the cathedral; however, the Empire, and indeed the *The Elder Scrolls* franchise in general, does not have a tradition of outcast groups that live ghettoized lives in the same sense as medieval Jews. Ghettos do exist in other installments in the franchise, specifically *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* and *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, but they mirror contemporary urban inner-city ghettos and are clearly wrestling with more contemporary issues of race.¹⁵ There is

¹⁵ The best example of a ghetto in the entire Elder Scrolls franchise can be found in the city of Windhelm in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The city's Dunmer are confined to an area called The Grey Quarter, an insulting reference to their skin color.

no convenient scapegoat in the setting that has not already been used or that would be a fitting target for crusades or religious warfare.¹⁶ Instead, it is The Prophet, ranting outside the chapel, who reveals what has happened to the player:

Hear me, O people of Cyrodiil! Look well upon the Chapel of Dibella. Look at the faces of the dead. This is your future. Evil has returned, and the Nine need a champion! Is there no one who would stand for the Nine?¹⁷

Rather than facing a new enemy, or a different iteration of a current enemy, the player is faced with the return of Umaril the Unfeathered. The greatest of the Ayleids has returned to get revenge and to reclaim the land for his people. The ruins of the Ayleids already dot the landscape of Cyrodiil, and players are already somewhat familiar with them since they were a part of the original game; now, players are given an opportunity to come face to face with the mythic past and its colonial elements.

The attack on the cathedral in Anvil invokes the need for a crusade. The medieval trope of crusades can be utilized even though it is not a crusade against a tangible Other across the sea or in lands just beyond the borders of the Empire. The monstrous Other has returned from the past, and, with the murder of the clergy and desecration of the altar to Dibella, there is a very medieval need for an order of holy warriors to protect the clergy and undertake a crusade to restore peace to the holy places of the faith. Without radically changing the setting for the game, the designers can capitalize upon the popularity of crusade imagery. It is a crusade to restore the status quo, not to change the world through religious warfare.

But the medieval elements do not end there. Before Umaril can be confronted, the first step that must be undertaken by the player is also a very medieval one: pilgrimage. The problem facing the people of Cyrodiil is that Umaril the Unfeathered and his Auroran servants cannot be completely defeated without divine help. And that divine help must come from the Crusader's Relics, the same armor and weapons used by Saint Pelinal Whetrake to defeat Umaril the first time.¹⁸ It is in this context that players must take the pilgrimage, purging them of their sin and making them worthy to

¹⁶ *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* already contains an extensive narrative that pits the Mages Guild against necromancers and their leader, Mannimarco, the King of Worms. Recycling a group of antagonists would make it harder to sell copies of the expansion, so another solution is required.

¹⁷ *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*.

¹⁸ *The Song of Pelinal—Volume 7: On His Battle with Umaril and His Dismemberment*.

find the relics and revive the order. The pilgrimage results in a mystical experience. Pelinal Whitestrake, the original Divine Crusader himself, appears to the player and provides guidance on how to find and recover the relics. He fills the role of a saint, acting as a mystical intermediary between the player and the deities. The mystical vision certainly falls within the boundaries of medieval hagiography. Pelinal Whitestrake also bears surprising parallels to Corineus in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Consider this passage:

Pelinal Whitestrake was the enemy of all elfkind that lived in Cyrodil in those days. Mainly, though, he took it upon himself to slay the sorcerer-kings of the Ayleids in pre-arranged open combats rather than at war; the fields of rebellion he left to the growing armies of the Paravania and his bull nephew. Pelinal called out Haromir of Copper and Tea into a duel at the Tor, and ate his neck-veins while screaming praise to Reman, a name that no one knew yet. Gordhaur the Shaper's head was smashed upon the goat-faced altar of Ninendava, and in his wisdom Pelinal said a small plague spell to keep that evil from reforming by welkynd-magic. Later that season, Pelinal slew Hadhuul on the granite steps of Ceya-Tar, the Fire King's spears knowing their first refute.¹⁹

Now compare this with Geoffrey's discussion of Corineus fighting Goemagog:

Brutus had ordered that his life be spared because he wanted to see him wrestle with Corineus, who was always most eager to fight giants. Overjoyed, Corineus hitched up his tunic, threw his weapons aside, and challenged the giant to wrestle. The bout began, both Corineus and the-giant closing to encircle each other with their arms, whilst their panting breath disturbed the air.²⁰

Also, consider Corineus's general love of battle, described by Geoffrey in a previous war in Aquitaine:

Summoning his courage, he shifted his troops to the right wing, closed them up and made a swift charge against the enemy; the dense formation of his men allowed him to get among the enemy, where he cut them down without respite until he had broken their ranks and put

¹⁹ *The Song of Pelinal—Volume 3: On His Enemy.*

²⁰ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History*, 474–89.

them all to flight. Having lost his sword, he chanced on an axe, with which he sliced down the middle anyone he met. Corineus' boldness and courage amazed Brutus and his comrades, and even the enemy.²¹

While it would be imprudent to draw parallels between other figures in the narrative, such as Saint Alessia and Brutus, Pelinal is, intentionally or not, a medieval character with roots that go as far back as Corineus. Again, *The Knights of the Nine* fuses together multiple medieval literary elements into a single narrative, creating medievalism beyond the boundaries of simple swords-and-sorcery.

The vision leads to a series of quests to recover the relics of the Divine Crusader. The quests to obtain the relics follow a fairly standard pattern found in romance; however, it is the final confrontation between the player and Umaril that bears the most relevance to this particular analysis. With the holy order restored, with new knights recruited to fill its ranks, with the relics recovered, and with the location of Umaril finally revealed, the crusade can finally commence. In many other gameplay instances, the player will often battle monsters alone or with a single ally. In this particular case, every knight the player has recruited to join the holy order will go to Garlas Malatar, an Ayleid ruin with a vast underground complex not unlike a cave to which giants could have been driven into hiding, and do battle alongside the player against Umaril's minions, the Aurorans, who are themselves physically larger and stronger than any of the knights that join the order.

Umaril, much like Goemagog, can be found and combated alone at the very lowest part of the cave complex in which he resides. The player defeats Umaril's physical form in the fashion of Corineus; the player also fulfills a hagiographic function by pursuing Umaril's spiritual essence into the Daedric realm of Oblivion, via a miracle granted by the Nine Divines, and annihilating him once and for all. The player fulfills the function of a crusader, is hailed as a living saint who demonstrates proof of the Divines' power, and maintains the status quo by preserving Cyrodiil for its current inhabitants. The player can rest assured that humans will continue to dominate the region without interference from its original inhabitants.

This brings us back to our original question of why would Bethesda weld the medieval narrative of the giants of Albion to a narrative of a crusade? Why not just tell a story about giants returning or a story about going off on a crusade? The answer lies in the detailed setting and the profit motive of video-game developers like Bethesda. It would be tempting to say that a desire to be sensitive to customers around the world (Bethesda can and does

²¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History*, 350–70.

sell *The Elder Scrolls* franchise around the world) in the wake of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq results in a crusade narrative that is far less recognizable because it is fused to a narrative that entails the return of giant-like monsters. Yet, a crusade against the original monstrous inhabitants of Cyrodiil also invokes imperialism and colonialism, not unlike more conventional crusade narratives. Instead, the real issue seems to be a desire to maintain the status quo in the setting, a setting that was developed years before the invasions of Afghanistan or Iraq, and even long before the attacks on 11 September 2001. Instead of a desire to be politically correct when dealing with issues of imperialism and colonialism, profit seems to be the driving motive.²² With a detailed setting such as this one, which has been developed over the course of twenty years, radical changes to the setting require time to flesh out; fans of the franchise demand some kind of coherence to the setting. This means hiring more writers and spending more money; yet, the cost of the expansion was only \$9.99 for downloadable PC version, and 800 Xbox points for Xbox users.²³ Radical changes to the setting require new concept artwork, new graphics in the game, new voiced dialog, new virtual books, new combat mechanics, perhaps even changes to the game's physics engine if a new part of the world is explored with different climate, weather, and materials for weapons and armor. Expansions to video-games, as opposed to sequels or new installments in a franchise, have smaller budgets. This means that, owing to profitability considerations, radical change is simply not possible. Since Ayleid ruins were already a part of the original game, and their origin was an unexplored part of the game's setting, building upon these elements saves time and money. Thus, the crusade narrative must be a crusade to maintain the status quo rather than change the political reality of the world. And given the setting, the only suitable Other to strive against is an enemy from the distant past that functions just like the medieval giants. The great irony is that the desire to maintain the status quo fits just as neatly with narratives associated with colonialism and imperialism as do stories about conquest, making the content of *The Knights of the Nine* far more medieval than its contemporary corporate origins would ever suggest.

²² The expansion had rather confusing press before its release, including statements that it would be exclusive to PS3, and that it would be free at first, only to have Bethesda announce later that it would be available on Xbox and PC for a price. The confusion seems to extend from a change in business plans that favored a new approach that included more potential customers and more revenue. Bethesda never had an official statement about why they changed their minds, but anyone wanting to explore the subject in more detail should read the interviews given to Gamestop, IGN, and 1UP in 2006. Regardless of the details, it is not difficult to see profitability as an important factor in the expansion's development, given its development cycle.

²³ 800 Xbox points was roughly equivalent to \$10.00 in 2006.

The Dark Ages of the Mind: Eugenics, Amnesia, and Historiography in Dan Brown's *Inferno*¹

Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly

Eugenics is one of those words that seems older than it is. The term itself, though, is actually younger than the movement that it has come to represent. Francis Galton, cousin to Charles Darwin and English public intellectual at large, first proposed his ambitious program of human improvement through selective breeding and sociological investigation in a two-part article, published in 1865 in *MacMillan's Magazine* and, in much more detail, in his 1869 *Hereditary Genius*.² When the movement's first two names, "viriculture" and "stirpiculture," proved to be public-relations nightmares, Galton subsequently coined the term "eugenics," which, derived from the Greek for "good" and "birth," was meant to imply the "conditions under which men of a high type are produced."³ Eugenics, as such, began tinkering with its origins almost from the moment it was conceived. Concerned with establishing its own lineage, it returned relentlessly to history as a means of rationalizing

¹ We originally presented a version of this article at the fall 2012 Studies in Medievalism conference. We are grateful for the feedback that we received there, and for the help of the audience in shaping this chapter.

² Francis Galton, "Hereditary Talent and Character," *MacMillan's Magazine* 12 (1865): 157–66, 318–27; Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869). For a history of the eugenics movement, see Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ For Galton's original definition of "eugenics," see his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, 2nd ed. (London: Dent & Dutton, 1907), 17, n. 1. For the problems with the movement's original two names, see Lester F. Ward, "Eugenics, Euthenics, and Eudemics," *The American Journal of Sociology* 18:6 (May 1913): 737–38.

many of the social, economic, and political measures that its proponents believed were necessary for the propagation of a more hygienic future.

The medieval was key to this strategy. As Charles Dellheim notes, Victorian historiography often found itself negotiating two sometimes-overlapping and sometimes-competing versions of the past: the classical and the medieval.⁴ Although eugenics had only just begun to come into its own at the sunset of the Victorian age, eugenicist historians were no exceptions to this rule. For eugenicists, the classical provided significant philosophical and practical precedent, while the medieval was the source of the Germanic heritage which, they believed, had long buttressed the whole of Western civilization. At the same time, however, they also blamed the medieval for a misguided institutionality that they believed was ever undermining such sustaining Anglo-Saxon stock. Consequently, many eugenicists approached the medieval with profound ambivalence. To them it represented the very real possibility of a past that was always imminent: the threat that, if left unchecked, the Malthusian pressures of population growth could cause society to degenerate into a new and permanent Dark Ages, one that was marked by the want, suffering, and ignorance traditionally associated with the original.

These concerns have found a new voice in the transhumanist movement, a loosely knit coalition of futurist groups that advocate employing cutting-edge technologies to achieve the nebulous goal of “improving the human condition.” Although proponents of transhumanism are careful to distance their movement from the horrors of negative or coercive eugenics, they are often vocal advocates of positive, or, in their terminology, liberal, opt-in eugenics – policies that they argue are necessitated by the ever-increasing burdens imposed by population growth and technological development. A case in point can be found in a promotional video produced for one of the movement’s signature conferences, the International Global Futures 2045 congress. Titled *2045: A New Era for Humanity*, the video promotes a distinctly post-industrial vision of “future man,” one in which a variety of high technologies allows humanity to realize a “new vector for human civilization, aimed at constant human development and evolution.”⁵ Yet, as the video’s narrator makes clear, this glorious technological future is by no means guaranteed. As an Elizabethan galleon founders in high seas, presumably as it struggles to cross to the New World, the narrator argues that humanity faces a stark choice: “to fall into a new dark age, into affliction and degradation,

⁴ Charles Dellheim, *The Face of the Past: The Preservation of the Medieval Inheritance in Victorian England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27.

⁵ “2045: A New Era for Humanity,” 28 April 2012, video clip, YouTube, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01hbkh4hXEK>>, accessed 14 August 2013.

or to find a new model for human development and create not simply a model for new civilization, but a new mankind.” It is only by doing so, the video claims – by working toward “new” ethical, ideological, philosophical, and cultural paradigms – that humanity can escape the “murder of nature” and realize the next stage in a self-directed evolution away from its corporeal and planetary limits.

Thus, while transhumanism (like eugenics before it) is eager to promote itself as cutting-edge, the movement’s sales pitch recalls a long tradition of eugenicist medievalist discourse, one in which the example and the threat of the Dark Ages is used to argue for a new morality and a new ethics. Interested in the way that transhumanism, as the unwilling inheritor of eugenics, attempts both to distance itself from and to engage such problematic nineteenth- and twentieth-century origins, this article examines how both movements exploit the popular medievalisms of their times as a means of insinuating themselves into a larger positivist historiography. Specifically, we argue that eugenics maintained an ambivalent relationship with the medieval, participating in, on the one hand, the era’s popular nostalgia for a presumed, shared Germanic heritage while promoting, on the other, a critique of contemporary institutionality as irredeemably beholden to outmoded, dysgenic medieval models. In doing so, it promised to save the past from itself – to deliver humanity from the crisis of a Dark Ages that was imagined as always impending. We argue that transhumanism enacts a similar strategy. Using Dan Brown’s 2013 novel *Inferno* as an example, we examine how transhumanism substitutes the medieval for its own past in order to construct a future that, like the original Renaissance, is imagined as the consequence not only of new technologies, but, ultimately, of new moral and ethical imperatives.⁶

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In his essay “Living in the New Middle Ages,” Umberto Eco argues that our contemporary fascination with the Middle Ages is grounded, in large part, in the anxiety that we are presently experiencing a “new Middle Ages.”⁷ Seeking to understand how this anxiety is constructed, Eco writes that just two elements are required to “make a good Middle Ages”: the sense that a “great peace [...] is breaking down” and the insecurity that results. Otherwise, Eco argues that “our medieval parallel” need not be accurate or even

⁶ Dan Brown, *Inferno* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).

⁷ Umberto Eco, “The Return of the Middle Ages,” in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 73.

symmetrical, especially not where niceties such as population and technology are concerned.⁸ As he explains:

For while in the other Middle Ages decline in population was strictly linked with abandonment of the cities and famine in the country, difficulty of communication, decay of the Roman roads and postal system, lack of central control, today what seems to be happening [...] is the opposite phenomenon: excess of population interacts with excess of communication and transportation, making the cities uninhabitable not through destruction and abandonment but through a paroxysm of activity.⁹

As if to substantiate Eco's satirical claim that he created Dan Brown as a character for his novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, these observations provide an apt summary of what, in Brown's *Inferno*, is the primary source of a larger, collective insecurity.¹⁰ Taking as its epigraph a maxim frequently attributed to Dante, that the "darkest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis," Brown's novel invokes the specter of the looming, Malthusian "Population Apocalypse" in order to justify one of the chief tenets of the transhumanist agenda as it is articulated through the *Global Futures 2045* video: that the crises of the present demand not only technological revolution, but also, as the video urges, "a new civilizational paradigm [...] new philosophy and ideology, new ethics, new psychology, new culture, and, ultimately, a new metaphysics."¹¹

Despite its ultimately polemical turn, Brown's novel begins conventionally. As in Dante's poem, readers discover Brown's serial protagonist, Harvard "Symbolologist" Robert Langdon, in something of a "dark wood where the straight way was lost."¹² Suffering from temporary amnesia, apparently the result of an attempt on his life, he wakes in a Florentine hospital to discover that the only clue to the past two days of his life is a slightly altered digital projection of Botticelli's famous map of Dante's *Inferno*. As he pursues this clue, leveraging his knowledge of Dante's *Divine Comedy* and of medieval Florence and Venice in an attempt to recover his memory and evade various paramilitary groups, Langdon gradually realizes that he has stumbled on a

⁸ Eco, "Return," 77.

⁹ Eco, "Return," 77.

¹⁰ Deborah Solomon, "Questions for Umberto Eco," *The New York Times*, 25 November 2007.

¹¹ Brown, *Inferno*, 177.

¹² Dante Alighieri, *Inferno: The Divine Comedy*, Vol. 1, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 23.

larger conspiracy, one that involves, among other things, the World Health Organization, Dante's death mask, and a plague virus designed by disgraced geneticist and transhumanist Bertrand Zobrist just before committing suicide.

Worse yet, Langdon realizes that this conspiracy is beyond the power of even his eidetic memory to affect. Concerned with the future rather than the past – with the threat that overpopulation poses to the planet – this conspiracy forces Langdon to come to terms with a proposition that he very much wants to deny: namely, that, if left unchecked, exponential population growth will produce a global catastrophe equivalent to the Black Death. Confronted with the almost certain possibility of this neo-Malthusian nightmare, Langdon finds that, despite his initial misgivings, he not only agrees with Zobrist's views on population, but understands the scientist's motivations: the fact that neither the World Health Organization nor the world's governments will act to address the threat of overpopulation. Langdon thus recognizes that the only way that humanity can stop its inevitable descent into a new Dark Ages is to embrace programs that are traumatic in the short term. Flying into the sunset, with a paperback copy of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in his lap, he concludes that in "*dangerous times, there is no sin greater than inaction*," and, accordingly, vows that he will never again be guilty of what, to Brown, is the most dangerous "global pandemic" – our propensity to deny and therefore exacerbate the problems of the present.¹³

Brown's novel thus presents readers with a high-tech version of an earlier eugenicist argument, one whose frequent references to disease and plague recall what, to Arthur Dendy, were the essential categories of eugenics historiography: the contrast between a "dark ages of superstition, with all the accompanying horrors of witchcraft and sorcery" and a "new era of rational progress, in which psychology will replace occultism as the chemistry of today has replaced the alchemy of our forefathers, absorbing from it all that is of permanent value and rejecting the worthless and dangerous dross."¹⁴ Central to this distinction was a Malthusian skepticism of charity and state aid. Eugenicists were, for the most part, unyielding disciples of Malthus, and much of their polemic was fundamentally Malthusian, inasmuch as it linked unrelenting social decline to the ongoing transfer of resources from the well-to-do to their supposed inferiors through taxation, charity, or other social agencies.¹⁵ They were not, however, as politic as Malthus, who viewed

¹³ Brown, *Inferno*, 462.

¹⁴ Arthur Dendy, "Evolution and the Future of the Human Race," *The Eugenics Review* 12:4 (1921): 276.

¹⁵ On the eugenicist appropriation of Malthus, see Eric B. Ross, *The Malthus Factor: Poverty, Politics, and Population in Capitalist Development* (New York: Zed Books, 1998), 55–72.

poverty as a sort of Jobian blessing, a trial, akin to scarcity, posed by the divine to “rouse man into action, and form his mind to reason.”¹⁶ Eugenics instead postulated that poverty, or, as they called it, “pauperism,” was hereditary and selective and could thus only be “cured,” as E. W. MacBride wrote, by preventing “the poor from being born.”¹⁷ For eugenicists, then, poverty and its concomitant social woes were “a curse” both to the afflicted and “to their descendants and to the communities in which they live.”¹⁸ The ultimate danger to humanity, they claimed, was not that population growth would, as Malthus famously predicted, outstrip available resources, but that the “unfit” would ultimately outbreed their betters, gradually but irreversibly eliminating through processes of “contra-selection” the traits that they held to be essential for racial and national “progress.” Harvard zoologist G. H. Parker, for example, warned that civilization would soon be submerged, if not annihilated, by the “very-growth” of “defective” populations:

It appears that in many of our civilized populations today, the defective classes are increasing more rapidly than any other constituent of the community and that quite aside from the enormous cost that their care entails upon the public at large, their very growth threatens our civilization with future submergence, if not annihilation.¹⁹

Likewise, pragmatist philosopher F. C. S. Schiller estimated that the “civilized State” was “extirpating the very qualities it values most” at a rate of “50% [...] in every generation.”²⁰ “Consequently,” wrote Schiller, “all existing societies, must be [...] pronounced to be appallingly *dysgenic*. They are all engaged in destroying, radically and racially, whatever ‘eu’ they themselves have recognized.”²¹

Eugenicists viewed such apparent and rapid increases in degeneracy as symptomatic of a deeper moral and ethical malaise, one that threatened at any moment to plunge contemporary society into an always imminent and, arguably, medieval primitivism. As Philippa Levine notes, eugenicists under-

¹⁶ Thomas Malthus, *An Essay On the Principle of Population*, ed. Geoffrey Gilbert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 145.

¹⁷ E. W. MacBride, “Problems of Population and Parenthood,” Review of *Problems of Parenthood, Being the Second Report of and the Chief Evidence Taken by the National Birth-Rate Commission 1918–1920*, *The Eugenics Review* 12:3 (1920): 223.

¹⁸ Frances Jewett, *The Next Generation: A Study in the Physiology of Inheritance* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1914), 6.

¹⁹ G. H. Parker, “The Eugenics Movement as a Public Service,” *Science*, n.s. 41:1053 (1915): 342–43.

²⁰ F. C. S. Schiller, “Eugenics versus Civilization,” *The Eugenics Review* 13:2 (1921): 337.

²¹ Schiller, “Eugenics versus Civilization,” 337.

stood the term “primitive” to have a certain evolutionary weight while not being, ultimately, historically descriptive. They believed that while advanced societies would eventually supersede the primitive, it was entirely possible for these societies to coexist with or even to harbor enclaves of primitivism.²² They also believed that there was a very grave possibility that an advanced society could regress partially or, worse yet, wholly to primitivism.²³ For eugenicists, then, primitive and advanced cultures were endpoints on the same practical continuum. Many eugenicists viewed history through a similar lens, arguing that the classical period encompassed a relatively positivist progression away from the primitive, with “state-sponsored infanticide” giving way, as Allen G. Roper writes in his 1913 *Ancient Eugenics*, to “definite scheme[s] of Negative Eugenics,” and these, in turn, “giving rise to the Positive” before “fad[ing] into the background, [...] retained merely as a check to the imperfections of a constructive scheme.”²⁴

According to Roper, the starting point for such developments was Sparta, whose citizens first realized the significance of good breeding to martial and social progress and whose example would inspire successive waves of advanced classical cultures, each implementing, with varying degrees of success, some version of the Spartan eugenic ethos.²⁵ Yet if Sparta represented the earliest example of the eugenic state, then Rome represented its counterpoint: the earliest example of the dysgenic state. According to Roper, the lessons of Sparta were completely lost on the Romans, who made “no conscious effort to build a scheme of racial regeneration” and who held “little interest [...] in schemes of hygiene or social reform.”²⁶ It was only a matter of time, then, before the pressures of degeneracy and negative population growth led to the fall of Rome, just as they had in the cases of Sparta or any number of other classical cultures. Yet the fall of Rome did not inspire, in relatively short order, the rise of some equivalent, alternative classical state, but instead precipitated a “Dark Ages” that was ultimately inimical to both scientific and racial progress.

The Middle Ages thus represented a break in what was, in eugenicist historiography, the relatively predictable rise and fall of classical civilizations. To some extent, this was not an entirely unwelcome development. Eugeni-

²² Philippa Levine, “Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Allison Bashford and Philippa Levine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 48.

²³ Levine, “Anthropology,” 48.

²⁴ Allen G. Roper, *Ancient Eugenics: The Arnold Prize Essay for 1913* (Oxford: B. H. Blackwell, 1913), 15.

²⁵ Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 16–30.

²⁶ Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 14.

cists were keen participants in wider popular attempts to distinguish (in Britain) colonizers from the colonized and (in America) founding fathers from immigrants by locating the origins and subsequent success of the British people (and, by extension, their American “cousins”) in some shared Germanic “Anglo-Saxon” heritage.²⁷ For eugenicists, primitivism, medieval or otherwise, provided a ready explanation for the origins and stolid resilience of such racial potentiality. The conditions of the period may have been exceptionally “severe,” they argued, but such conditions nevertheless resulted in a refined, enduring “biological capital” that would long sustain the whole of European civilization. MacBride makes this point explicitly, explaining that the “mediaeval [...] struggle for existence was so severe that [‘defectives’] did not affect the general constitution of the population nearly as much as they are liable to do now.”²⁸ Likewise, Schiller writes that European civilization would be even worse off were it not “still living on its biological capital, on the qualities bred into the Nordic stock by the severest natural selection, while it was still barbarian, only 1,500 years ago.”²⁹ Madison Grant echoes this sentiment in his 1916 *Passing of the Great Race*, though he locates the origins of Nordic exceptionalism in the harsh conditions that prevailed in Neolithic Scandinavia.³⁰ For Grant, the fall of Rome resulted in the last great invigorating and relatively sustaining influx of northern blood into the provinces that had previously been controlled by the Roman Empire.³¹

To a greater extent, though, the medieval represented a problematic deferral of the primitive. As we have seen, eugenicist historians and anthropologists held that all cultures, from the primitive to the advanced, rose and fell in accordance with their relative ability to balance the needs of the strong against those of the weak and defective. The most successful cultures, they held, deployed progressively sophisticated eugenic technologies and philosophies to check the growth of the “unfit” and “defective,” while those that lacked or abandoned eugenics initiatives gradually declined under the Malthusian burdens associated with sustaining increasingly “degenerate” populations. The various nascent states of medieval Europe might have been brimming with Nordic and Anglo-Saxon potential, but they were neverthe-

²⁷ As Bryan Ward-Perkins notes, such connections were popularized by the Anglo-Saxonist Edward Freeman and the historian John Richard Green in the last third of the nineteenth century and persisted well into the first half of the twentieth. See Bryan Ward-Perkins, “Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?,” *The English Historical Review* 115: 462 (2000): 518–21.

²⁸ E. W. MacBride, “The Study of Heredity: Part IV,” *The Eugenics Review* 8:4 (1917): 354.

²⁹ Schiller, “Eugenics versus Civilization,” 391.

³⁰ Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race: Or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916), 152–53.

³¹ Grant, *Passing*, 161–69.

less subject to the same dysgenic pressures as were their classical antecedents. Worse yet, they lacked the eugenics programs that had, at least to eugenicist historians, proven so critical to the development of the classical world. Accordingly, Roper located the medieval squarely in the void between Aristotle and Galton, in what he describes as a vast "gulf of years in which Eugenics lies amid the lumber of forgotten theory."³²

Central to this argument was the eugenicist critique of the Church, which embodied what they described as emergent "egotist" and "individualist" philosophies. Under the Spartans and in the eugenic utopias imagined by Plato and Aristotle, the good of the racial-state trumped all other considerations. With the Church, however, the good of the individual (which is to say, the good of the self) trumped all other concerns, even in cases where such interests ran counter to some greater racial good. At best, the Church institutionalized an "imprudent altruism," as Roper puts it, which effectively ended even such primitive eugenic recourses as infanticide and exposure and, in so doing, gradually weakened the race.³³ At worst, the Church served its own interests above all else. The Church was, according to Grant, historically inherently anti-racial and anti-national; it "everywhere used its influence to break down racial distinctions," "disregard[ing] origins," and instead stressing obedience to its own mandates above all else.³⁴ It was, he continues, expressly opposed "to all national movements. It is the imperial as contrasted with the nationalistic ideal and in that respect its inheritance is direct from the Empire."³⁵

While Roper does not ultimately implicate the Church in the post-Aristotelian decline of the eugenic ideal, other eugenicists were not so generous.³⁶ In a passage that would be cited repeatedly by his followers, Galton ascribed the "long period of the dark ages under which Europe has lain" to "celibacy enjoined by religious orders on their votaries" and ecclesiastical persecutions "of the foremost thinkers and men of political aptitudes."³⁷ The Church, wrote Galton, practiced "the arts which breeders would use, who aimed at creating ferocious, currish and stupid natures" to produce "generations of the future [...] comprising 'the servile, the indifferent, and [...] the stupid.'"³⁸ For Madison Grant, such "unconscious experiments in limiting reproduction

³² Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 71.

³³ Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 7.

³⁴ Grant, *Passing*, 76–77.

³⁵ Grant, *Passing*, 77.

³⁶ The blame, Roper argued, lay with Roman society, and he even went so far as to suggest that if Rome had adapted more universal and sensible eugenic policies, then the Church may have been much more tolerant of the movement. *Ancient Eugenics*, 12–14.

³⁷ Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 357, 358.

³⁸ Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 357, 358.

to the undesirable classes” would prove especially detrimental to the “genius producing strains” of medieval and early modern Europe.³⁹ Galton, however, argued that the rote, “servile” routines of the medieval scriptorium had a more immediate effect on ecclesiastical intellectual production:

One of the most notable changes that can come over a nation is from a state corresponding to that of our past dark ages into one like that of the Renaissance. In the first case the minds of men are wholly taken up with routine work, and in copying what their predecessors have done; they degrade into servile imitators and submissive slaves to the past. In the second case, some circumstance or idea has finally discredited the authorities that impeded intellectual growth, and has unexpectedly revealed new possibilities. Then the mind of the nation is set free, a direction of research is given to it, and all the exploratory and hunting instincts are awakened.⁴⁰

To eugenicists, then, the medieval church institutionalized the stagnation not just of racial progress but also of intellectual and, by implication, historical progress. This is not to say that they viewed the Middle Ages as a time without science or learning, but it was a time when learning proceeded, at best, inefficiently and was, as Charles Davenport writes, “treasured by encloistered scholastics.”⁴¹ Consequently, eugenics languished, according to Roper, as late as “three centuries ago” as only the “Utopian dream of an imprisoned monk.”⁴²

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Brown constructs the medieval in much of the same way – as an impoverished, degenerate period whose potential is ultimately unable to sustain itself against the deprivations of the time. Such potential is exemplified in the novel primarily through the figure of Dante, whom Brown constructs as the inspiration for much of the cultural production of the Italian Renaissance and the periods that followed. Speaking through Langdon, who frequently pauses to remember details of a lecture about Dante’s *Inferno* that he delivered years before, Brown declares that “it is impossible to overstate the influence of Dante Alighieri’s work. Throughout all of history, with the sole exception perhaps of Holy Scripture, no single work of writing, art, music, or literature has inspired more tributes, imitations, variations, and annotations than

³⁹ Grant, *Passing*, 48–49. Here, Grant is reproducing a condensed version of Galton’s charges against the Church.

⁴⁰ Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, 2nd ed., 129.

⁴¹ Charles Davenport, “The Value of Scientific Genealogy,” *Science*, n.s. 41:1053 (1915): 337.

⁴² Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 4.

The Divine Comedy.”⁴³ As proof of this, Brown tells readers that the *Divine Comedy* not only “became such a pillar of Italian culture that Dante’s writing style has been credited with nothing less than the codification of the modern Italian language,” but also influenced a number of the most recognizable artists of the Italian Renaissance, including Michelangelo himself, who, in a poem about Dante, wrote “Ne’er walked the earth a greater man than he.”⁴⁴

Brown, however, also portrays Dante as a victim of the institutionalized brutality of his times. Stressing the fact that Dante’s political entanglements ultimately forced him to flee Florence, Brown describes the resulting exile in language that explicitly invokes the way that Galton, Grant, Roper, and many other eugenicists characterized the plight of the exceptional during the Middle Ages. Brown, for example, interprets the opening six lines of Canto 25 of Dante’s *Paradise* literally, writing that they not only reflect the physical toll of composing the *Divine Comedy*, but also express Dante’s “aching hope that perhaps his heavenly poem could overcome the wolfish brutality of the exile that kept him from his fair Florence.”⁴⁵ Brown offers a similar interpretation of the next six lines of the canto. Focusing on Dante’s declaration that “I shall return as a poet and put on / at my baptismal font, the laurel crown,” he writes that these lines represent an “oblique reference to a political deal offered to Dante by his enemies. According to history, the ‘wolves’ who banished Dante from Florence had told him he could return to the city only if he agreed to endure a public shaming – that of standing before an entire congregation, wearing only sackcloth as an admission of his guilt.”⁴⁶ Setting aside the obvious objection – that such literal, autobiographical interpretations ignore what Kevin Brownlee has identified as the allegorical significance of the passage – Brown’s summary explicitly constructs Dante as a martyr of sorts, one whose failure to realize a triumphant return to Florence is indicative of the degree to which the characteristic political institutions of the Middle Ages, working through the Church, attempted to reduce genius to sackcloth.⁴⁷

Dante’s example does not simply speak to the circumstances of the Middle Ages, but ultimately to those of the present as well – in particular, to the plight of Bertrand Zobrist. Brown portrays Zobrist in much the same way that he portrays Dante: as an unparalleled genius whose clarity of vision results in his exile and persecution by larger political institutions. Readers

⁴³ Brown, *Inferno*, 83.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Brown, *Inferno*, 83.

⁴⁵ Brown, *Inferno*, 228.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Inferno*, 229.

⁴⁷ Kevin Brownlee, “Why the Angels Speak Italian: Dante as Vernacular Poeta in *Paradiso* XXV,” *Poetics Today* 5:3 (1984): 606.

learn as much from Sienna Brooks, the young doctor who helps Langdon escape from his Florentine hospital and subsequently accompanies him for much of the novel. A disciple of Zobrist's and, as Langdon later discovers, Zobrist's one-time lover, Brooks reveals that Zobrist is a "proponent of the Population Apocalypse Equation," which, as she explains, is the "mathematical recognition that the Earth's population is rising, people are living longer, and our natural resources are waning. The equation predicts that the current trend can have no outcome other than the apocalyptic collapse of society."⁴⁸ Brooks also explains that Zobrist believes that the only way that humanity can avoid this calamity is to suffer a "mass extinction event" as catastrophic as the Black Death.⁴⁹ The novel's omniscient narrator summarizes this logic as follows:

For Bertrand Zobrist to describe the Black Death as the best thing to happen to Europe was certainly appalling, and yet Langdon knew that many historians had chronicled the long-term socioeconomic benefits of the mass extinction that had occurred in Europe in the 1300s. Prior to the plague, overpopulation, famine, and economic hardship had defined the Dark Ages. The sudden arrival of the Black Death, while horrific, had effectively "thinned the human herd," creating an abundance of food and opportunity, which, according to many historians, had been a primary catalyst for bringing about the Renaissance.⁵⁰

Convinced that humanity is doomed to a new Dark Ages unless drastic steps are taken, Zobrist's views earn him the enmity not only of the scientific community, but also of the World Health Organization, which Brown implicitly identifies with a dysfunctional mediaevalsque institution primarily through its director, Elizabeth Sinskey. Introduced as a gaunt, otherworldly figure whose last name carries unmistakable religious undertones, she adds Zobrist to a number of bioterrorism watch lists after he tries to enlist her aid in addressing overpopulation. Zobrist responds to this institutional persecution in much the same way that, according to Brown, Dante responded to his exile from Florence. Declaring that "Dante's hell is not fiction ... it is prophecy," Zobrist retires from public life and begins composing his masterpiece, a genetically engineered virus that, inspired by Dante's frequent references to plagues, he names "Inferno."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Brown, *Inferno*, 177.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Inferno*, 177.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Inferno*, 177.

⁵¹ Brown, *Inferno*, 144. Zobrist names his virus, 7.

Brown likewise conflates the medieval and the modern in the various settings of his novel. For example, he portrays contemporary Venice as a “*slowly sinking museum*,” a city whose illustrious past is always present in its architecture, artwork, and other tangible reminders of its history.⁵² In Venice, however, this historical present is threatened not by Zobrist’s biological weapon, which Langdon and his companions mistakenly believe is hidden in the city, but by what Zobrist characterizes as the greater threat, the “disease” of overpopulation. Langdon confronts symptoms of this disease at every turn in Venice. He discovers, for instance, that the city’s canals are overcrowded with boats, that its salt air is tainted with diesel fumes, and that a never-ending queue of ten-storey cruise ships, their rails packed with tourists, waits to sail past St. Mark’s Basilica. When he finally arrives in St Mark’s Square, he discovers that the press of tourists is such that the “entire piazza looked almost as if it would sink beneath the weight of its admirers.”⁵³

Glimpsing a number of these tourists sporting the distinctive masks worn by medieval plague-doctors, Langdon cannot help but think of an older Venice, one that, as Brown is quick to tell readers, “reigned gloriously as the commercial center of Europe” before the “population’s taste for foreign luxuries” brought the plague in the fourteenth century.⁵⁴ Brown thus constructs Dante’s Venice as a cautionary tale of sorts. Brought to its knees by the degeneracy of its people, by their appetite for oriental luxuries, it becomes synonymous not just with Langdon’s Venice, but, as Brown makes clear, with the predicament of the world as a whole:

Venice hosted a staggering number of tourists every year – an estimated one-third of 1 percent of the world’s population – some twenty million visitors in the year 2000. With the additional billion added to earth’s population since that year, the city was now groaning under the weight of three million more tourists per year. Venice, like the planet itself, had only a finite amount of space, and, at some point, would no longer be able to import enough food, or dispose of enough waste, or find enough beds for all those who wanted to visit it.⁵⁵

Venice, as such, embodies the Malthusian crisis at the center of the novel. Overcrowded and sinking, its historic canals and piazzas clogged with tourists, it provides a dramatic example not only of the looming threat of overpopulation, but also of many of the ancillary problems that Brown attributes,

⁵² Brown, *Inferno*, 297.

⁵³ Brown, *Inferno*, 305.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Inferno*, 301.

⁵⁵ Brown, *Inferno*, 305–6.

through Zobrist, to overpopulation: poverty, ozone depletion, and, of course, the crush of tourists clamoring to glimpse what were once treasures reserved exclusively for the world's elites.

Venice, however, ultimately represents a beginning as well as an end. Repeatedly telling readers that medieval Europe would never have been able to achieve the Renaissance had it not been for the ravages of the Black Death, Brown implies that contemporary society contains a similar potentiality – that, like fourteenth-century Venice, it contains the seeds of a new era of culture and prosperity, a new Renaissance. In constructing Venice in this way, as the embodiment of the mediaevalque primitivism of the present, Brown invokes what, to many eugenicists, was a familiar historical argument, the idea that at any moment the present could become the past. D. S. Jordan makes this point explicitly in a 1910 Independence Day address republished in *The Eugenics Review*. Asking “Does history ever repeat itself?,” he concludes that it “always does, if it is true history. If it does not we are dealing not with history but with mere succession of incidents. Like causes produce like effects, just as often as men may choose to test them.”⁵⁶ For eugenicists such reasoning meant that the problems of the past were simultaneously those of the present and the future; the British Empire could be essentially a Roman and a Holy Roman Empire as well as any number of other medieval, classical, and even primitive cultures, inasmuch as it was equally subject to the same dysgenic processes that had historically functioned to undermine racial and national progress. Thus, for Leonard Darwin, “many of the symptoms [...] discernable in Europe before the advent of the Dark Ages” were equally as evident in the present:

If we wish to prevent the British Empire from following in the footsteps of the Roman Empire and of many other civilizations which have flourished for a time and then disappeared, we must advocate the adoption of more widespread reforms. Many of the symptoms now clearly discernable in our social condition are the same as those which we know were discernable in Europe before the advent of the Dark Ages, and we must bestir ourselves in many directions if we are to avoid a similar period of decay in the future.⁵⁷

As with Brown's account of Venice, the future that Darwin proposes is defined by two radically opposed pasts. The first is, of course, the “advent of

⁵⁶ D. S. Jordan, “War and Manhood: Address given in Boston, July 4th, 1910,” *The Eugenics Review* 2:2 (1910): 102.

⁵⁷ Leonard Darwin, “The Future of Our Race. Heredity and Social Progress,” *The Eugenics Review* 16:2 (1924): 101.

the Dark Ages" and its resulting "period of decay," while the second is the advent of "widespread reforms" that have the potential not just to forestall the coming apocalypse but to revitalize an "empire" that is imagined to be flagging under the weight of an evident medieval malaise.

The ultimate purpose of such rhetoric was, of course, to transmute historical precedent into ethical imperative. Accordingly, Eugenicists formulated these opposing future-pasts in much the same way that Brown's novel does: by frequent and sometimes strange allusions to the religious. As we have seen, eugenicists associated Catholicism with a wide range of medi-evaesque dysgenic practices. Yet they did not object to Christianity or, for that matter, religion *per se*. As Christine Rosen has noted, Galton himself called for eugenics to be "introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion," and his followers consciously and systematically sought to recruit the faithful.⁵⁸ Perhaps the most influential advocate for this new Christian eugenics was William Inge, who would eventually become Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. In an early piece for *The Eugenics Review*, Inge argues that the Christian ethic of personal sacrifice is entirely in keeping with eugenicist calls for a return to a moral and ethical order that valued the "welfare of the community" over that of its more "undesirable" members:

Christian ethics does not (as is often supposed) teach the duty of preserving and multiplying life at all hazards. Once convinced that so-and-so was an undesirable citizen, the Church [...] lost no time in hurrying him out of the world. No doubt they usually burnt the wrong people, which was very unfortunate; and you must not suppose that I want to see *autos da fe* even of our most degraded specimens; but my point is that there is nothing inconsistent with Christianity in imposing as well as enduring personal sacrifice where the highest welfare of the community is at stake.⁵⁹

Inge would later write in his 1930 *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* that eugenics "is a religion, and its name is Christianity."⁶⁰ Such views, according to

⁵⁸ Quoted in Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5. For a comprehensive account of eugenicist efforts to recruit the clergy, see Rosen's fourth chapter, "Eugenicists Discover Jesus," 111–37.

⁵⁹ William Inge, "Some Moral Aspects of Eugenics," *The Eugenics Review* 1:1 (1909): 34. Inge is referencing a distinctly Protestant version of medieval and early modern ecclesiastical history here.

⁶⁰ William Inge, *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), 287.

Rosen, were neither unique nor, by eugenicist standards, extreme.⁶¹ The charismatic American author and lecturer Albert Edward Wiggam, for example, held that Eugenics represented the “final program for the completed Christianizing of mankind” and that Christ himself would have been more than willing to serve as “president of the First Eugenic Conference.”⁶² The “biological Golden Rule,” argued Wiggam – “the final reconciliation of science and the Bible” – was this: “do unto both the born and the unborn as you would have both the born and the unborn do unto you.”⁶³

Eugenicists thus positioned themselves as neo-reformers, applying Enlightenment rationality to reinterpret, as Galton put it, “religious precepts, founded on the ethics and practice of olden days [...] to make them conform to the needs of progressive nations.”⁶⁴ For eugenicists, the ultimate hope of preventing the looming apocalypse of degeneracy lay in a “new biological ethics,” one that held, as G. Stanley Hall put it, “that everything is right that makes for the welfare of the yet unborn and all is wrong that injures them, and to do so is the unpardonable sin – the only one nature knows.”⁶⁵ Such “new biological ethics” were not, however, meant to replace Christian ethics, but rather to realign them with the mandates of natural selection. If “progress” were measured, as eugenicists believed it should be, in terms of the relative “good” that society provided for current as well as future generations, then natural selection was indeed an ethical process, inasmuch as it provided inherent mechanisms to eliminate the unfit and hence ensure the future good. “Ethics,” Samuel Z. Batten explained, “is in the nature of things; the cosmic process from start to finish has ethical significance.”⁶⁶ Thus, if ethics and natural selection seemed to be at odds in advanced societies, it was not, they argued, because they were fundamentally irreconcilable, but because the “modern ethical spirit” had abandoned the mandates of natural selection and embraced, in their stead, a flawed Christian ethic that would, as Batten put it, “never again allow the unfit and the defective to live uncared for or to die unpitied.”⁶⁷

As with Inge and Wiggam, Batten’s critiques of the contemporary “Christian spirit” and concomitant “eleemosynary institutions” were meant to be more persuasive than polemical, to advocate, as he puts it, for a “modern

⁶¹ Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics*, 130.

⁶² Quoted in Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics*, 129–30.

⁶³ Quoted in Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics*, 129–30.

⁶⁴ Galton, “Studies in Eugenics,” *American Journal of Sociology* 11:1 (1905): 20.

⁶⁵ G. Stanley Hall, “Education in Sex-Hygiene,” *The Eugenics Review* 1:4 (1910): 242.

⁶⁶ Samuel Z. Batten, “The Redemption of the Unfit,” *American Journal of Sociology* 14:2 (1908): 241–42.

⁶⁷ Batten, “Redemption,” 242.

society, motivated by the Christian spirit, and working in a scientific way” to eliminate the unfit and the defective.⁶⁸ For Batten, formulating a scientific, progressive Christianity was a fundamentally medievalist endeavor, one demanding that he posit an alternative that was sufficiently menacing and sufficiently present to justify intervention. Accordingly, he turned to eugenicist historiography, to the specter of a distinctly medieval Church that inevitably and unfortunately, as Inge put it, “burnt the wrong people,” distorted doctrine, and generally had a stultifying effect on historical and racial progress.⁶⁹ Batten thus argued that ecclesiastical doctrines regarding poverty and its resulting inequalities arose from “the Dark Ages of the human mind.”⁷⁰ The same, he argued, applied to doctrines that rationalize and perpetuate “misery” and poverty as necessary for the salvation of the better off:

It is a matter of record that an English bishop has actually defended poverty on the ground that it is necessary that there be a certain amount of misery in the world in order that good people may have some objects on which to exercise the grace of charity. Hence, since God has declared that there shall be poor in the land it is both impious and irrational to expect the abolition or diminution of poverty. So long as the theologians felt, with or without reason, that they were vessels unto honor they were little inclined to question the theory that others were made for dishonor [...] . These views it may be said belong to the Dark Ages of the mind and can no longer be tolerated; in fact some of them would have seemed primitive to Moses, and Socrates would have been stoned on the streets of Athens as a corrupter of the youth for teaching such doctrines.⁷¹

Batten does not identify the “English bishop” in question here, but the point is that he did not need to: the bishop, like the “Dark Ages of the mind,” existed both in the past, present, and future, as did the very real threat of reverting to a “primitive” in which the newly rediscovered eugenic ideal

⁶⁸ Batten, “Redemption,” 236, 242.

⁶⁹ Inge, “Moral Aspects,” 34.

⁷⁰ Batten, “Redemption,” 247.

⁷¹ Batten, “Redemption,” 243–44. The notion that the poverty was ordained by the divine as a means, in part, of providing for the salvation of the rich through the giving of alms played a key role in medieval conceptions of poverty and charity, as did the injunction, drawn from biblical precedent, that the “poor would always be among us.” On medieval conceptions of charity, see Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 87–113.

languished with Roper's "lumber of forgotten theory" in some musty ecclesiastical basement.⁷²

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Eugenicists thus believed that contemporary society was ever teetering on the brink of a new Dark Ages, an anxiety that Darwin articulated explicitly in an address delivered to the 1922 Galton Centenary Celebration:

If Galton's teachings remain unrefuted, and if his name will be unknown to the public centuries hence, that will mean, so I feel sure, that no steps will have been taken to prevent the racial deterioration which we now fear is in progress, and that the degradation of our national characteristics will have become well marked. Europe will for a second time have entered the dark ages, after a second decline and fall of a civilization in some ways comparable to that of ancient Rome.⁷³

While Brown's *Inferno* provides a contemporary version of such anxieties, he cannot express them as directly. Invested in maintaining at least the appearance of historical realism, his novel cannot ignore the cost in human lives and suffering that resulted from many so-called "Christian" and "Scientific" measures that Galton and his followers advocated. Accordingly, Brown develops his argument for population control gradually, delivering it through a succession of increasingly sympathetic characters, all of whom are explicitly constructed as more intelligent and more able than the reader. Readers first encounter it, for example, from Zobrist. Pacing in front of a projected image of one of Gustav Doré's interpretations of Dante's hell, he advises Sinskey that unless the World Health Organization addresses the threat of overpopulation, humanity faces a future that is every bit as dark, twisted, and gothic as Doré's illustration. Having invoked the medieval, Zobrist then offers what, to Galton and his followers, would have been a very familiar argument – namely that the threat of overpopulation constitutes a spiritual as well as a material crisis. "Under the stress of overpopulation," Zobrist states, "those who have never considered stealing will become thieves to feed their families. Those who have never considered killing will kill to provide for their young. All of Dante's deadly sins – greed, gluttony, treachery, murder, and the rest – will begin percolating ... rising up to the surface of humanity."⁷⁴ The

⁷² Roper, *Ancient Eugenics*, 71.

⁷³ Leonard Darwin, "Galton Centenary Addresses," *The Eugenics Review* 14:1 (1922): 9. Darwin is here imagining the consequences of a future where Galton's teachings are "unrefuted" because they have been forgotten.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Inferno*, 103.

only way to avoid this fate, Zobrist concludes, is by drastic and immediate action: by working to reduce the world's population by approximately three billion souls. When Sinskey reacts in horror, he declares that this is the only moral choice: that otherwise humanity is doomed to degenerate into a very permanent and very medieval hell. "Mankind," he states, "is hovering now in a purgatory of procrastination, indecision, and personal greed ... but the rings of hell await, just beneath our feet."⁷⁵

Readers encounter a markedly more rational version of this argument from Brooks, who summarizes the academic article in which Zobrist first expresses his ideas about overpopulation. After explaining that the article proved controversial because Zobrist declared that "all doctors should stop practicing medicine because extending the human life span was only exacerbating the population problem," she surprises Langdon by stating that despite her misgivings about Zobrist's methods, she cannot fault his logic.⁷⁶ "Speaking from a purely scientific standpoint," she tells him, "all logic, no heart – I can tell you without a doubt that without some kind of drastic change, the end of our species is coming. And it's coming fast. It won't be fire, brimstone, apocalypse, or nuclear war ... it will be total collapse due to the number of the people on the planet. The mathematics is indisputable."⁷⁷ Brooks, as such, reframes the argument at the center of the novel. Dispensing with Zobrist's distinctly mediaevalsque, moralistic logic, she presents the question of overpopulation to Langdon as a matter of ethics: as a matter of acting for the greater social good in accordance with rational scientific principles. In doing so, she follows the example of earlier eugenicists who also proposed a positivist, evolutionary ethics as an alternative to the mediaevalsque sentimentality of concepts like sin, hell, and charity.

Readers encounter a distinctly futurist version of this argument from Sinskey herself. In a conversation that occurs a little more than halfway through *Inferno*, but which, told in flashback, predates the events of the novel, she provides Langdon with a crucial bit of information about Zobrist: namely that he is affiliated with the "H+", or the transhumanist movement. While both she and Langdon evince skepticism and, at times, shock at the tenets of transhumanism, she nevertheless provides a predominately positive description of the movement, one that echoes many of the talking points in the *Global Futures 2045* video. She states, for instance, that transhumanism is not a radical movement, but is in many ways the natural outgrowth of more traditional scientific endeavors, such as attempts to design "vaccines that

⁷⁵ Brown, *Inferno*, 137.

⁷⁶ Brown, *Inferno*, 213.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Inferno*, 214.

make children immune to certain diseases ... polio, smallpox, typhoid.”⁷⁸ Citing Zobrist’s fictional work in germ-line engineering as an example, she explains that transhumanists want to bring about a sort of “assisted evolution,” one that represents the “ultimate expression of Darwinian ‘survival of the fittest’ – humans becomes a species that learns to improve its own evolutionary process.”⁷⁹

Yet while this description explicitly recalls the language that many eugenicists used to describe their work, Sinskey hesitates to associate transhumanism with eugenics. In one of the most significant exchanges in the novel, she tells Langdon that many transhumanists believe that advances in genetics will produce a “super-race” of posthumans who, she explains, will possess “increased dexterity, stamina, strength, even intelligence.”⁸⁰ When Langdon objects that this “[s]ounds eerily like eugenics,” the novel’s omniscient narrator interjects. After telling readers that the “reference [to eugenics] made Sinskey’s skin crawl,” the narrator explains that in the “1940s, Nazi scientists had dabbled in a technology they’d dubbed eugenics – an attempt to use rudimentary genetic engineering to increase the birth rate of those with certain ‘desirable’ genetic traits, while decreasing the birth rate of those with ‘less desirable’ ethnic traits.”⁸¹ Sinskey then reframes the argument. Taking a cue from the narrator, who explicitly associates eugenics with the past, she identifies transhumanism with the promise of a technological renaissance. Acknowledging that “[t]here are similarities” between transhumanism and the Nazi eugenics programs of the 1940s, she reiterates the central claim of the novel: that transhumanism represents humanity’s best hope for escaping the ills of the present. As she explains:

while it’s hard to fathom how one would engineer a new human race, there are a lot of smart people who believe it is critical to our survival that we begin that very process. One of the contributors to the Transhumanist magazine *H+* described germ-line engineering as “the clear next step” and claimed it “epitomized the true potential of our species.”⁸²

This assessment, however, is ultimately disingenuous. While there is not, as Sinskey suggests, a significant correlation between the transhumanist movement and the predominantly negative eugenics programs of Nazi Germany, the eugenics movement was much larger, longer lived, and more mainstream than she implies. As Chloe S. Burke and Christopher J.

⁷⁸ Brown, *Inferno*, 293.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Inferno*, 293.

⁸⁰ Brown, *Inferno*, 294.

⁸¹ Brown, *Inferno*, 294.

⁸² Brown, *Inferno*, 294.

Castaneda explain, eugenics not only enjoyed immense popular support in the early twentieth century in many industrialized countries, including the United States, but was championed by many prominent citizens who viewed eugenics as a means of addressing some of the most pressing social issues of their time, issues that were oftentimes as concerned with economics as race.⁸³ Moreover, the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II did not mark the end of many of these eugenics initiatives, particularly not the coercive sterilization programs, many of which began after World War II and survived well into the 1970s.⁸⁴ Burke and Castaneda thus argue that it is problematic to characterize eugenics in the way that Brown does: as an aberrant movement that began and ended with Nazi Germany. As they explain, "equating eugenics with the horrific dimensions of the Holocaust obstructs recognition of the diversity of eugenic goals and the widespread acceptance of eugenicists not just by an uneducated public, but by leading scientific, medical, and academic communities well into the mid-twentieth century."⁸⁵ The result, they write, is a "profound amnesia," one that is troubling to the extent to which it functions not only to sanitize and thereby absolve the sins of the past, but, in doing so, also to preclude a larger discussion of the degree to which our contemporary enthusiasm for biotechnology is often framed in terms that explicitly invoke earlier eugenics discourses.⁸⁶

Brown's *Inferno* both begins with and hinges on this historical amnesia. As mentioned earlier, the passage in which the novel's narrator explicitly associates eugenics with Nazi Germany occurs at the very beginning of the novel's timeline – just after Sinskey recruits Langdon to help her locate Zobrist's weapon. Readers do not encounter this conversation, however, until midway through the novel, when Brown delivers it in flashback in the chapter just before Langdon and company arrive in Venice and, besieged on all sides by the crush of tourists, begin to realize that Zobrist's concerns about overpopulation might be justified. It is perhaps appropriate, in this sense, that *Inferno* takes Langdon's amnesia as its starting point. Never fully cured, this amnesia involves both Langdon and the novel's readers in a recursive, revisionary process, one that demands that they constantly return to Dante's fourteenth century in order to decipher the mysteries of the present. Manifested through disinformation, misdirection, and other narrative sleights of hand, this strategy asks readers to imagine themselves in much the same role as Sienna Brooks and many of the other secondary characters in the

⁸³ Chloe S. Burke and Christopher J. Castaneda, "The Public and Private History of Eugenics: An Introduction," *The Public Historian* 29:3 (2007): 5–17.

⁸⁴ Burke and Castaneda, "Public and Private History," 11.

⁸⁵ Burke and Castaneda, "Public and Private History," 8.

⁸⁶ Burke and Castaneda, "Public and Private History," 9.

novel: as erstwhile collaborators who are at once privy to the various clues Langdon discovers, yet are denied anything more than momentary glimpses of the larger picture. Constructed in this manner, as confidants in Langdon's investigation, readers are afforded the illusion of privileged access to the ostensibly scholarly, historical process through which Langdon uncovers the truth about Zobrist and his motives.

Yet, in return, readers are also asked to participate in Langdon's quasi-religious, quasi-ethical awakening. Confronted at every turn with evidence of the threat of the impending Malthusian collapse of civilization, they not only accompany him as he is forced to reevaluate his assumptions about what constitutes right and wrong, but are themselves forced to undergo a similar process of self-examination by the novel's frequent plot twists and revelations – revelations that require readers to question many of their assumptions not only about Zobrist and his motives, but also about many of the narrative details that the novel lead had previously presented to them as factual. The labyrinthine structure of Brown's novel thus functions polemically to underscore one of the primary arguments that Brown makes for the cause of transhumanism: that our contemporary ambivalence about genetic engineering and other biotechnologies is rooted not in historical precedent, but as Langdon's conversion narrative vividly illustrates, in a number of deeply held misconceptions about the moral and ethical ramifications about the perils of exploiting such technologies to "improve" the human species.

Thus, while Brown's *Inferno* acknowledges the contemporary ambivalence about eugenics and its legacy, it approaches this ambivalence as a puzzle of sorts, a complex historical riddle that must be solved in order to negotiate an escape from the Dark Ages. This becomes clear in the conclusion of the novel, when Langdon, Sinskey, and Brooks discover that, as with so many other elements of the work, they have been mistaken about two of the key circumstances from which the novel derives much of its narrative momentum. They discover, for instance, that the date that Zobrist provides in his ominous posthumous video does not indicate the moment when his biological weapon will detonate, but when its virus will have reached its full saturation, infecting everyone on earth with its payload. More significantly, they discover that despite the novel's frequent allusions to the Black Death, Zobrist's virus does not seek to impose a gruesome, immediate death on the approximately three billion souls that he believes are detrimental to the health of the planet. Instead, the virus randomly renders a third of the world's population infertile, a method that, according to Brooks at least, retains the proportions of the Black Death without inflicting the horror.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Brown, *Inferno*, 438–39.

Langdon, Sinskey, and Brooks thus find themselves confronting the realization that everything they have suffered over the course of the novel has been for naught – that Zobrist's weapon had begun to release its contents at almost the very moment that his suicide prompted them to begin searching for it. Accordingly, they do not act to reverse engineer a cure for the virus or otherwise ameliorate its effects. Convinced that doing so will not address the threat of the more “serious overpopulation issue,” they instead turn to the one course of action that has consistently produced results; they rationalize the events of the novel in the image of a future that is imagined always impending.⁸⁸ Yet, for the first time in the novel, the future they imagine is not medieval but post-medieval: a renaissance that is constructed as a natural outgrowth of the new moral and ethical imperatives of transhumanism. They agree, for example, that what is required is not simply a “new breed of thinkers,” visionaries such as Zobrist who have the wherewithal to recognize that the frantic pace of technological change requires scientists to challenge presumably outdated moral paradigms. Recognizing that this is already happening, they conclude that what is needed is ultimately a new system of ethics: “new philosophies” such as Transhumanism that provide a moral framework within which such work can prosper.⁸⁹ Brooks makes this point explicitly. The heir-apparent to Zobrist's legacy, she tells Langdon and Sinskey that transhumanism offers contemporary society the moral means of achieving a technological utopia in which “[e]verything will soon be possible.”⁹⁰ As she states, “One of [transhumanism's] fundamental tenets is that we as humans have a moral obligation to *participate* in our evolutionary process ... to use our technologies to advance the species, to create better humans – healthier, stronger, with higher-functioning brains.”⁹¹ When Langdon asks if she thinks that “such beliefs are in conflict with the evolutionary process,” Brooks responds by declaring that, like Zobrist himself, genetic engineering and similar technologies are products of evolution:

genetic engineering is not an acceleration of evolution. It is the natural course of events! What you forget is that it was *evolution* that created Bertrand Zobrist. His superior intellect was the very product of the very process that Darwin described ... an evolution over time. Bertrand's rare insight into genetics did not come as a flash of divine inspiration ... it was the product of years of human intellectual progress.⁹²

⁸⁸ Brown, *Inferno*, 452.

⁸⁹ Brown, *Inferno*, 452–453.

⁹⁰ Brown, *Inferno*, 453.

⁹¹ Brown, *Inferno*, 453.

⁹² Brown, *Inferno*, 453.

Brooks thus offers a fitting coda for the novel. Citing Zobrist's actions as evidence of his love for and desire to save humanity, she presents transhumanism as natural and inevitable, as the obvious, evolutionary next step through which humanity can leverage the best aspects of its nature, as embodied by individuals like Zobrist, to paradoxically stage an escape from the "horrific disasters and misery" of an otherwise ever-present Dark Ages.⁹³

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The problem, though, is that it is ultimately not new, novel, or even radical to imagine that all of humanity's problems can be solved through the simple expedient of engineering "better" subjects. It is certainly also not new to imagine that the best way to eliminate those who are deemed unfit, degenerate, or extraneous is through involuntary mass sterilization. These expedients only appear new because Brown's novel has forgotten – and expects its readers to have forgotten – that many of the same arguments were made almost a century ago by any number of eugenicists who, professing their love for mankind, also believed that humanity could achieve utopia through the straightforward expedient of rationalizing reproduction through science and technology. Convinced that such measures were necessary for the survival of the species, they not only turned to questionable population and family studies, all of which testified to an ever-rising tide of degeneracy. They also found support in their own historiography, which, bolstered by the example of the Dark Ages, they believed to be equally empirical, reproducible, and predictive.

Such historiography was, of course, inherently paradoxical, predicated as it was on a Dark Ages that was, to a large extent, preceded by versions of itself. Yet this did not seem to trouble eugenicist commentators, who believed that the past was always present and always impending. If anything, such paradoxes made the consequences of inaction all the more terrible, as eugenicists, anticipating Eco's analysis, could claim to be still living in the medieval and thus have at least a degree of intimacy with the worst that the Dark Ages still had to offer.⁹⁴ Much of the same can be said for Brown's *Inferno*. Arguing that contemporary society is on the brink of a population apocalypse, it justifies its revival of older eugenicist discourses as a means of engineering an escape from the mediaeval hell of a present that, without drastic intervention, can never be anything other than the past. What is more, it justifies these interventions by citing the larger moral and ethical need, as Brooks states above, "to *participate* in our evolutionary process."⁹⁵

⁹³ Brown, *Inferno*, 453–54.

⁹⁴ Eco, "Return," 84.

⁹⁵ Brown, *Inferno*, 453.

Brown's *Inferno* is, in this sense, simultaneously a profoundly eugenicist and a profoundly medievalist novel. To the extent to which it is impossible to separate these two traditions, it foregrounds a point that is perhaps obvious, but which is easy to forget in our zeal for medievalist concepts like honor and chivalry: namely that not all medievalisms are inherently ethical. Brown's novel, however, also underscores a less obvious, though perhaps more important point: that each of these potentialities is simultaneously present and powerful in medievalism. That is to say, the allure of the medieval is as much rooted in the fantasy of the ethical as it is in horrors of depravity and brutality. This is perhaps why the idea of a Dark Ages carries such currency in Brown's work and in the medievalist historicism of the eugenicists before him. It is also perhaps why eugenics is often mistakenly associated with the Middle Ages in the spectacles of blood and blondness that dominate popular medievalism. As a metaphor for the violence of history, the Dark Ages provides a means of selectively remembering and of selectively forgetting the traumas of the past – that is, of a ready store of examples that can be deployed empirically as proof for any number of ideologies that lay outside the province of the rational and the scientific. This is certainly the case with the way that Eugenicists deployed the Dark Ages, citing the various imagined depravities of the period to justify a return to a presumably more rational classical past. This is also how Dan Brown uses the Dark Ages. He cultivates the horrors of Dante's *Inferno* to promote a positivist, transhumanist agenda while obscuring what is arguably a much more recent "Dark Ages of the human mind": the eugenics movements that, as Burke and Castaneda remind us, survived well into the latter part of the last century.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Burke and Castaneda, "Public and Private History," 8.

Plastic Pagans: Viking Human Sacrifice in Film and Television

Harry Brown

Midvinterblot and the Problem of Ritual Killing

In 1915 the Swedish painter Carl Larsson completed a massive work commissioned by the National Museum of Sweden to crown its central staircase. Larsson proposed a work to complement his earlier depiction of King Gustav Vasa's triumphal entry in Stockholm, also hanging in the central staircase. The new painting, *Midvinterblot*, represented a scene from Norse legend: King Domaldi of Sweden offering himself in sacrifice at the temple of Uppsala to save his people from famine. *Midvinterblot* sparked controversy even before Larsson finished it. The art critic August Brunius called the painting "unreal" and "creepy," comparing it to a "scene of cannibalism from darkest Africa."¹ It had no place in modern Sweden and no parallel in Gustav's heroic deliverance of the nation. The board of the museum agreed with Brunius and rejected the work as a depiction of a ritual killing. In 1984, the National Museum again refused to buy the painting, suggesting that it belonged instead in the Museum of National Antiquities with other relics of the pagan past. In 1997, following a popular exhibition of the painting, the National Museum finally acquired *Midvinterblot* and installed it above the staircase. After eighty-two years, Sweden made peace with King Domaldi.

Today we can appreciate Larsson's fascination with this legendary sacrifice, as well as the National Museum's long reluctance to accept it as a signal moment in Sweden's history. The lingering moral ambivalence about pagan ritual killing manifests itself in the films *The 13th Warrior* (1999) and

¹ "The opponent who became romantic," Sundsvalls Tidning, <<http://st.nu/kultur/1.730995-opponenten-som-blev-romantiker?m=print>>, accessed 30 September 2013.

Valhalla Rising (2009) and the television series *Vikings* (2013).² These works draw historical information from the same medieval sources that inspired Larsson, including Ahmad ibn Fadlān's ninth-century account of a Rus ship burial, Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century description of a pagan temple at Uppsala, and Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth-century retelling of Norse legends involving the sacrifice of kings. More interesting than this common range of sources, however, we find that what troubled Larsson in his composition of *Midwinterblot* continues to resonate in more recent portrayals of Viking human sacrifice in film and television.

As Larsson composed the painting between 1910 and 1915, he found that the depiction of Domaldi required special attention. His primary literary source, Snorri's *Ynglinga Saga*, does not say that Domaldi willingly submitted to death.³ In this respect, Larsson makes a critical alteration to his source, portraying the king's sacrifice as a voluntary act, performed for the good of Sweden.⁴ The painting features the nude Domaldi with his face turned to the sky and his hand on his breast, as if taking upon himself the suffering of his people. *The 13th Warrior*, *Valhalla Rising*, and episodes six and eight of *Vikings* place the same emphasis on the willingness of the sacrificial victim. In this respect, they join *Midwinterblot* in an ambivalent relation to their medieval sources, which offer ambiguous or contradictory testimony about the willingness of the victims of Norse human sacrifices. How should we interpret this dissonance between medieval texts that describe human sacrifice and medievalist film and television that portray human sacrifice?

In order to answer this question, I will survey representations of Viking human sacrifices in recent film and television, examine the relation between these portrayals and their adopted medieval sources, and consider the ethical questions raised by the commercial appropriation of human sacrifice and pagan religion. Why do these dramas consistently ascribe willingness to sacrificial victims? What does this pattern of revision tell us about modern tolerance or intolerance for pagan religious practices? What responsibilities do we bear in representing and interpreting human sacrifice, considering that the practice has been used to justify conquests, crusades, and pogroms? As examination of *The 13th Warrior*, *Valhalla Rising*, and *Vikings* in relation to medieval sources reveals, human sacrifice presents a perplexing dilemma to

² *The 13th Warrior*, directed by John McTiernan (1999; Walt Disney Video, 2000), DVD; *Valhalla Rising*, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn (2009; MPI Home Video, 2010), DVD; *Vikings: Season 1*, created by Michael Hirst (2013; Twentieth Century Fox, 2013), DVD.

³ Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga Saga*, in *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Athalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit XXVI–XXVIII (Reykjavík, 2002), vol. 1, 31–32.

⁴ Torsten Gunnarson, *Carl Larsson* (Stockholm: National Museum, 1992), 226.

liberal values, drawing the principle of religious tolerance into direct conflict with the equally compelling principle of human rights. In order to reconcile this ideological paradox, the pagan Vikings described in medieval sources must become plastic in their adaptation to medievalist film and television. The supposed willingness of the sacrificial victim in these adaptations serves as moral suasion, a way of allowing us to disapprove of the killing while tolerating the belief that motivates it. The problem for medievalist dramas is that their sources deny any such suasion.

Ibn Fadlān and the Volga Ship Burial

In 921, the Abassid caliph Muqtadir sent Ibn Fadlān as envoy to the Bulghār khan, who had recently converted to Islam. Ibn Fadlān's account of his meeting with Rus traders on the Volga remains one of the most widely known descriptions of Viking ritual practice. Fascinated with the customs of the barbarians, Ibn Fadlān recounts the ship burial of a Rus chieftain and the preparation of a slave girl to accompany her master on the pyre. For a period of several days, she receives queenly attention, feasting, drinking, and singing with the family of the dead man. When the festivities conclude, the ceremony turns grim. Dogs, horses, and cows are hacked to pieces and deposited on the ship with the corpse. The girl visits the tents of each of the chieftain's thralls and lays with them. They tell her: "Tell your master that I only did this for your love of him." Before she enters the chamber to lay with the corpse, she declares to all, as if looking toward Valhalla: "There I see my father and my mother. [...] There I see all my dead relatives. [...] There I see my master sitting in Paradise and Paradise is green and beautiful. There are men with him and young people, and he is calling to me. Take me to him."⁵

Ibn Fadlān says that the girl volunteers for this privilege. At the final moment, however, he suggests that her will fails. She is forbidden to change her mind and given a draught to dull her senses. When she falters on the threshold of the death chamber, a "witch, thick-bodied and sinister," called the "Angel of Death," shoves her inside.⁶ Six more men rape her, pin her by the hands and feet, and fix a cord around her neck. Then, Ibn Fadlān writes, the Angel of Death "approached the girl holding in her hand a dagger with a broad blade and plunged it again and again between the girls ribs, while the two men strangled her with the cord." Outside, the rest of the men beat their shields "to drown her cries, so that the other slave girls would not

⁵ Ibn Fadlān, *The Book of Ahmad Ibn Fadlān*, in *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travelers in the Far North*, trans. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone (New York: Penguin, 2012), 52.

⁶ Ibn Fadlān, *The Book*, 51.

be frightened and try to avoid dying with their masters.”⁷ These carefully rendered details belie the supposed willingness of the victim.

In his novel, *Eaters of the Dead* (1976), Michael Crichton merges Ibn Fadlān’s account of the Viking funeral with the legend of Beowulf, telling the story of a Viking war band, led by the heroic Buliwyf, who travel up the Volga to liberate a kingdom besieged by the Wendol, a tribe of feral cave dwellers with a taste for human flesh. The first three chapters of the novel consist of a direct transcription of Ibn Fadlān’s account, with the rest of the narrative told in his own voice as an imagined extension of his travels.⁸ For Crichton, Ibn Fadlān’s voice seemed well suited to the novel, a medieval eyewitness identifiable to a modern reader. In a postscript to *Eaters of the Dead*, Crichton writes, “I concluded that the most useful account would be written by an outsider – someone not part of the culture, who could report objectively on the events as they occurred. [...] Ibn Fadlān had a distinct voice and style. He was imitable. He was believable. He was unexpected.”⁹ Subsequent Viking dramas, we will see, likewise find the detached, “objective” voice a useful device, a means of rendering scenes of human sacrifice with simultaneous immediacy and distance.

The 13th Warrior, John McTiernan’s film adaptation of Crichton’s novel, opens with a revised version of Ibn Fadlān’s account of the Rus ship burial. One of the more affable Vikings, Herger, has a rudimentary knowledge of Latin, as does Ibn Fadlān, and Herger obliges his Arab guest with an interpretation of the ritual. After the funeral, Buliwyf, now chieftain, receives word that Rothgar, a friendly king in the north, needs help against an unknown enemy. A witch foretells that Buliwyf must face the monsters with thirteen companions, and that the thirteenth warrior must not be a Northman. Ibn Fadlān, portrayed by Antonio Banderas, is conscripted for the cause and reluctantly sails north with his courageous but obnoxious pagan companions.

When they arrive at the besieged kingdom, Buliwyf, Ibn Fadlān, and their band track the Wendol to their underground lair, discovering that their adversaries are not monsters but savages who wear bearskins and practice cannibalism. After repelling an initial attack, they infiltrate the Wendol’s den and kill their “mother,” a shaman, though Buliwyf is poisoned in the fight. Prior to the final assault by the Wendol, the weakened Buliwyf prepares to give his life for Rothgar’s people. He leaves his sick bed and joins his warriors, praying the same words that the slave girl spoke before her death: “Lo, there do I see my father. Lo, there do I see my mother and my sisters

⁷ Ibn Fadlān, *The Book*, 53.

⁸ Michael Crichton, *Eaters of the Dead* (New York: Ballantine, 1976).

⁹ Crichton, *Eaters*, 196.

and my brothers. Lo, there do I see the line of my people back to the beginning. Lo, they do call to me. They bid me take my place among them in the halls of Valhalla, where the brave may live forever!" As Buliwyf intones these words, all the warriors, including Ibn Fadlān, join in the prayer, and Buliwyf's sacrifice parallels the earlier sacrifice of the slave girl. After the battle, with the Wendol in retreat, Buliwyf takes a seat on the wooden rampart, as if taking a seat in Valhalla, and dies.

While Crichton and McTiernan find direct inspiration in Ibn Fadlān's narrative, they neutralize the moral difficulty presented by human sacrifice. The scene at the beginning of the film omits several significant details provided by Ibn Fadlān, including the ritual rape, the animal sacrifices, and the evidence of the victim's reluctance at the fatal moment. These unpleasant attendant rites would have complicated the subsequent portrayal of Buliwyf and his companions as heroes and liberators. In this way, *The 13th Warrior* makes the slave's death seem relatively peaceful and bloodless, less offensive to modern moral sensibility. Crichton and McTiernan also offer a kind of compensation in Buliwyf's sacrifice, whose leadership was inaugurated and solemnized with human sacrifice at the beginning of the film. A Viking hero, the film suggests, gives his own life as readily as he accepts another life in sacrifice. While Ibn Fadlān had no historical or dramatic interest in depicting the Rus as heroes, *The 13th Warrior*, like Larsson's *Midwinterblot*, has to change the moral valence of human sacrifice, which still holds the potential to disturb us as much as it disturbed Ibn Fadlān.

The Vikings, a series created by Michael Hirst for the History channel in spring 2013, also adapts Ibn Fadlān's account of the Rus ship burial. The first season chronicles the rise of the legendary Danish hero Ragnar Lothbrok, portrayed by Travis Fimmel as a ruthless and ambitious young warrior determined to win glory by plundering wealthy kingdoms in England and France. In episode 2, "Wrath of the Northmen," Ragnar and his brother Rollo lead the infamous raid on the Northumbrian monastery of Lindisfarne, the event commonly cited by historians as the beginning of the Viking era. Ragnar, Rollo, and their companions slaughter most of the monks, but Ragnar claims one, Aethelstan, as his slave, bringing him back from Northumbria to serve his household. For the remainder of the series, Aethelstan, like Crichton's and McTiernan's fictionalized Ibn Fadlān, serves as a detached observer, a device for ethnographic exposition whose Christian sensibility provides an ethical anchor for the viewer's reaction to pagan ritual practices.

In episode 6, "Burial of the Dead," Ragnar has defeated his rival, Jarl Haraldson, in a duel and taken his place as chieftain. Ragnar instructs Aethelstan that Haraldson, though his enemy, earned honor in life and death and so deserves a fitting funeral celebration. Like Buliwyf, Ragnar inaugurates his reign with a death rite for his predecessor. Hirst follows McTiernan in

adapting his Viking funeral directly from Ibn Fadlān's narrative. A slave girl volunteers to accompany her master to Valhalla, gets drunk and sings about her good fortune, and pleasures all the Jarl's companions before her ritual slaughter at the hands of the Angel of Death, here a tall and haunting figure. Hirst also follows McTiernan in muting the most troubling details, ignoring Ibn Fadlān's observations of the girl's struggle while faithfully reproducing the source in most other respects. Curiously, the resulting scene, accompanied by a plaintive lament, may calm rather than disturb the viewer. In a significant departure from Ibn Fadlān's narrative, the slave girl gives her gold bracelets to the Angel of Death as a token of submission and her readiness to die. She calls to the gathering: "I can see my master. He is in Valhalla. He calls me. Let me join him, then." She closes her eyes as the Angel of Death quietly slips the blade across her throat and falls limp. The Jarl's men skip the gang rape and strangulation described by Ibn Fadlān and carry her to the pyre, as if gently putting her to bed.

The scene has further structural parallels with *The 13th Warrior*, deriving from a shared approach to their source. Just as Herger interprets the funeral ritual for Ibn Fadlān, translating the prayers and explaining the meaning of the gestures, Bjorn, Ragnar's adolescent son, interprets the funeral for Aethelstan. Both scenes invite the viewer to identify with the outside observer, sharing in their quasi-modern reaction of fascination mixed with horror. Like them, we may at least take comfort that the wretched girl submits willingly to her fate, though the original Ibn Fadlān offers no such consolation in his unflinching record of her protracted agony.

Adam of Bremen and the Temple at Uppsala

Scholars suspect that Adam of Bremen, unlike Ibn Fadlān, never visited the places he describes in his writing, and they recognize that he writes about pagan Scandinavia with a Christian bias. Nevertheless, Adam's *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* remains, with Ibn Fadlān's narrative, one of the primary sources of knowledge about medieval Norse customs and beliefs.¹⁰ In his *History*, Adam provides the description of the temple at Uppsala that inspired Larsson in his composition of *Midvinterblot*:

It is customary also to solemnize in Uppsala, at nine-year intervals, a general feast of all the provinces of Sweden. [...] The sacrifice is of this nature: of every living thing that is male they offer nine heads, with the blood of which it is customary to placate gods of this sort. The bodies

¹⁰ Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 326–27.

they hang in the sacred grove that adjoins the temple. Now this grove is so sacred in the eyes of the heathen that each and every tree in it is believed divine because of the death or putrefaction of the victims. Even dogs and horses hang there with men. A Christian seventy-two years old told me that he had seen their bodies suspended promiscuously. Furthermore, the incantations customarily chanted in the ritual of a sacrifice of this kind are manifold and unseemly; therefore, it is better to keep silence about them.¹¹

Scholia attached to Adam's description provide further details about the temple: a glittering gold chain marking the boundary of the temple, a sacred well where living victims are drowned and sacrificed, and a large evergreen tree standing next to the temple and spreading its branches over the sacred grove.¹²

In episode 8 of *Vikings*, "Sacrifice," Ragnar and his wife, Lagertha, quarrel after her miscarriage of Ragnar's son. Convinced that they must reconcile with the gods, they decide to travel to Uppsala to attend the great religious festival and pray for another male child. In secret, Ragnar and Lagertha plan to sacrifice Aethelstan for this purpose, trading one life for another. Ragnar's clan receives religious guidance from "the Seer," a blind and horribly disfigured spiritual counselor, who claims to know the gods' will. When they arrive at the temple, a priest wearing eye black and white robes anoints Ragnar and his family with blood, as they kneel before huge wooden idols of Odin, Thor, and Frey. As the priests prepare sacrifices of sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, and horses (nine of every kind), Uppsala begins to look like an outdoor rock-festival, with music, drinking, hallucinogenic mushrooms, and lots of casual sex. King Horik of Sweden arrives to preside over the grand finale, and everyone but Aethelstan himself knows the reason that Ragnar has brought him to Uppsala. The monk seems bemused when Thyri, Rollo's stepdaughter, seduces him, strips him naked, and ritually washes him, giving him the same treatment the slave girl received before Jarl Haraldson's funeral in "Burial of the Dead."

Aethelstan finally learns the truth when the priest summons him to the temple and informs him of his fate. Horrified, the monk bolts from the temple. The Seer then informs Ragnar and his family that the gods have rejected their offering because Aethelstan is not a willing victim. If Ragnar does not find a replacement, the Seer declares, the gods will curse them all. Leif, Ragnar's thrall, rises and declares: "Before anyone else can claim this

¹¹ Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschann (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 208.

¹² Adam of Bremen, *History*, 207.

honor, I desire to be sacrificed for the sake of my family, for the sake of all of you, my friends. But even more, for the sake of all humans in Midgard. I trust that the gods will find my sacrifice acceptable, in which case, I look forward to it joyfully." At the ceremony that follows, King Horik wields the ritual blade, and the priests collect the blood spilling from the altar. Leif ascends proudly to fate, bidding farewell to Ragnar and the others, who accept his death as a great gift. The episode closes with the image of Leif and the other victims hanging by their feet in the sacred grove.

In "Sacrifice," Hirst uses Adam's description of the temple at Uppsala as a primary source. Like McTiernan, however, he insulates his pagan hero from the potential moral objections of the audience. The priest's rejection of Aethelstan as a sacrificial victim spares Ragnar from having to perpetrate a murder. Leif's volunteering to take Aethelstan's place likewise spares Ragnar from having to order one of his followers to die. Just as the willingness of the slave girl and the ministrations of the Angel of Death in *The 13th Warrior* absorb the sacrificial blood and allow Buliwyf to appear more heroic by his detachment from the ritual, the willingness of Leif and the ministrations of the Seer allow Ragnar to retain his sheen of heroism and generosity.

Snorri, the Sagas, and the Sacrifice of Odin

Snorri Sturluson's *Ynglinga Saga*, contained in the *Heimskringla*, a chronicle of the Norse kings, provides important context for Adam's description of Uppsala. While Adam views the rituals performed there as pagan abominations, deservedly uprooted by Christianity and forgotten, Snorri, while also writing as a Christian, plumbs the Norse legends that lived in the sacred grove. The *Ynglinga Saga* includes the story of the sacrifice of Domaldi that inspired Larsson's *Midwinterblot*:

Domaldi succeeded his father Visbur, and became ruler of his lands. During his reign, there was famine and starvation in Sweden, so the Swedes held large sacrifices at Uppsala. The first autumn, they sacrificed oxen, but despite that the harvest was no better. The following autumn, they sacrificed men, but the harvest was as bad, or worse. The third autumn, when it was time for the sacrifices, the Swedes flocked to Uppsala in great numbers. The chieftains held a meeting and agreed unanimously that Domaldi, their king, was the cause of the famine, so they decided to attack and kill him and sacrifice him for a good harvest. And that is what they did. They reddened the altars with his blood.¹³

¹³ Sturluson, *Ynglinga Saga*, 31–32.

Contrary to Larsson's interpretation of the legend, the decision to offer the sacrifice at Uppsala does not belong to Domaldi but to his chieftains, who seize him by force. Because Larsson conceived *Midwinterblot* as an allegory of the heroic self-sacrifice of Sweden's past leaders, parallel to Gustav Vasa's triumph, he had to portray Domaldi as a willing victim.

Other instances of human sacrifice from the sagas likewise suggest that the victim submits through trickery or force, not by free choice. The *Ynglinga Saga* relates a further instance of a king sacrificed to forestall a famine:

Many people were banished from Sweden by King Ivar. They heard that Olaf Tretelgja had good land in Varmaland and they thronged there in such large numbers that the land could not support them all, and there was much famine and misery. [...] King Olaf did not sacrifice much, and this displeased the Swedes, who believed that the famine was caused by the king's laxity. So they mustered an army and marched against him. Taking him by surprise, they burned him alive in his house and gave him to Odin as a sacrifice for a good year.¹⁴

Like Domaldi, Olaf Tretelgja dies at the hands of his people, who, pushed to the extremity of misery, rise in revolt. Neither account of kingly sacrifice in the *Ynglinga Saga* describes the willing participation of the victim, such as we find in *Midwinterblot*.

Gautreks Saga similarly relates the story of an unfortunate king, Vikar of Agder, who is tricked by the hero Starkad to sacrifice himself in exchange for good raiding weather. When Odin demands the sacrifice, Vikar and his army draw lots to determine the victim. The king unexpectedly draws his own number but refuses to submit. After meeting with Odin in secret, Starkad deceitfully proposes a symbolic death ritual, with calf gut replacing the noose, and a reed replacing the spear. Vikar agrees to take part, unaware that Starkad has conspired with Odin. The calf gut only appears so by Odin's magic; it is really a rope. Likewise, the reed is really a spear. Vikar submits to his death unwittingly:

The king mounted the tree-stump, and Starkad placed the halter around his neck. Then Starkad stepped down from the stump to the ground, thrust at the king with the reed, and saying, "Now I give you to Odin," let go of the fir branch. The reed turned into a spear and went right through the king. The tree-stump fell away from under his

¹⁴ Sturluson, *Ynglinga Saga*, 74.

feet. The calf's entrails became a strong rope, and the branch sprang up and lifted the king to the top of the tree.¹⁵

Odin grants the fleet good weather, but Starkad is exiled for his deception.

The image of King Vikar hanging in a tree, pierced by a spear, like the image of nine men hanging in the sacred grove at Uppsala, recalls one of the most striking images from Norse mythology: Odin hanging from the world-tree Yggdrasil, suffering to learn the wisdom of the runes. In *Hávamál*, part of the *Poetic Edda*, Odin sings of his ordeal and describes the relation between sacrifice, wisdom, and the power of the gods:

I hung, I know,
on the wind-tossed tree
for nine nights in all,
suffered the spear wound,
was offered to Odin,
– myself to myself –
tormented on the tree
which rises from roots
hidden from human kind. [...]
Do you comprehend how runes are cut?
how to comment on the characters?
how the characters must be colored?
how to test their truth?
how prayer is to be practiced?
do you understand how offerings are made?
how the sacrifice is sent on its way?
how the sacrifice is slaughtered?¹⁶

In *Hávamál*, we find a connection between the poetry and wisdom contained in the runes and the sacrifice necessary to attain them. Unlike Odin, the sacrificial kings in *Ynglinga Saga* and *Gautrek's Saga* do not hang willingly, though the suffering and subsequent awakening of the god-king on Yggdrasil provide clues to understanding the reason that the Norse pagans sanctified the hanging of slaughtered men from trees as a way of bringing their communities back to life.

Nicolas Winding Refn's *Valhalla Rising* features an enigmatic central char-

¹⁵ *Gautrek's Saga*, in *Fornaldarsögur Northurlanda*, ed. Guthni Jónsson, 99, vol. 4 (Reykjavik: N.A., 1959), 31.

¹⁶ *Hávamál*, ed. David A. H. Evans (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1986), 68–70.

acter, portrayed by Mads Mikkelsen, who resembles the sacrificial god on Yggdrasil in several respects. Like Odin, he has only one good eye, and in fact claims no name for himself other than "One-Eye," the derisive moniker given to him by his enemies. One-Eye also seems favored by Odin in his preternatural fighting skill, which he uses to win duels, to slaughter anyone who would enslave him, and to protect an orphan boy who follows him on his aimless travels. One-Eye also possesses Odin's gift of secret wisdom, an ability to foresee future events that guides his actions. He never speaks, though he allows the boy to speak on his behalf.

After killing his masters and escaping slavery, One-Eye and the boy meet a band of "crusaders," who propose to sail to the Holy Land to win wealth and salvation. One-Eye and the boy join the group, but their ship immediately and inexplicably becomes lost in the fog, eventually landing in what appears to be a new-world wilderness, lush but empty of people except some lurking, orange-painted natives. As the party argues about their predicament, the natives snipe at them with arrows, sapping their morale and their sanity until only a few of their party remain. Their zealous leader, known only as "the General," proposes to establish a new Jerusalem in the wilderness, while the rest of his men believe that One-Eye has somehow drawn them all to Hell. As the last of them surrender to lunacy or despair, killed by the natives or each other, One-Eye has a vision of his own death and wades to a small island to build a cairn. Accompanied by the boy, he then sets out to confront the natives. When One-Eye finds them on a rocky outcrop overlooking the sea, he does not dispatch them in his customary battle frenzy. Rather, he steadies the frightened boy, drops his axe and his sword, and walks defenseless into the midst of the natives, who beat him to death with their war clubs.

The subtitle to this final segment of the film, "Sacrifice," provides a clue to the meaning of One-Eye's actions. In seeking the natives, he offers himself in sacrifice, and, like Odin, he has foreseen his fate. What he means to gain by his sacrifice remains unclear, though the end of the film suggests that One-Eye has offered himself for the boy, who stands alone on the rocks, spared by the natives: a life for a life. As the boy gazes to the ocean and the mountains, a final, ghostly image of One-Eye emerges from the mists, as if the warrior has returned to his divine form.

Valhalla Rising differs from *The 13th Warrior* and *Vikings* in that it does not explicitly invoke medieval texts in its portrayal of Norse heroes, nor does it situate the sacrifice offered by One-Eye in the obvious context of a religious rite. Nonetheless, the film does have the contours of religious allegory: a godlike figure travels to a place like Hell, where he gives his life to protect a boy. We have no Yggdrasil, no runes, no poetry, but the whole film, with One-Eye's secret knowledge rendered as flash-forwards and flashbacks, has the otherworldly look of saga and myth. Like *Ynglinga Saga* or *Hávamál*,

Valhalla Rising depicts blood sacrifice as the driving force of life, renewal, and wisdom. The film leaves us with the image of renewed creation: a transfigured god, a young boy, and a new world.

Plastic Pagans

In her book, *In Search of First Contact*, a study of the Viking legacy in America, Annette Kolodny introduces the idea of the “plastic Viking” to describe the adaptability of Norse legend and history to a wide variety of ideological projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “Depending on the purpose at hand and the sources cited,” Kolodny writes, “the Norse could be depicted variously as heroic warriors and empire builders, barbarous berserker invaders, fighters for freedom, courageous explorers, would-be colonists, seamen and merchants, poets and saga men, glorious ancestors, bloodthirsty pagan pirates, and civilized Christian converts.”¹⁷ In his introduction to *The Vikings on Film*, a collection of essays surveying cinematic portrayals of medieval Norsemen, Kevin J. Harty observes the same trend: “such films are anything but monolithic in the way they have chosen to depict our Scandinavian and Norse forbearers.”¹⁸

While they are not “monolithic” in their portrayal of Vikings, *The 13th Warrior*, *Vikings*, and *Valhalla Rising* adapt medieval sources in a consistent and intentional way. Each one portrays the sacrificial victims as willing, the killing as consensual. While these works do not wholly cleanse Viking religion of the blot of human sacrifice, they effectively erase the most troubling aspects of Ibn Fadlān’s, Adam’s, and Snorri’s accounts of Norse death rites. This sanitization illustrates the plasticity of medieval pagans in film and television, particularly as we adapt them to the role of medievalist action-heroes. Although they might look like relics of the past, fit for the Museum of National Antiquities, they appear fair and humane, unwilling to accept a sacrifice that is not freely offered. Depicting Viking ritual killings as consensual resolves the paradox that human sacrifice presents to modern moral sensibility, allowing us to tolerate it as a prerogative of pagan beliefs while still allowing the victims their proper freedom and dignity. In this way, religious tolerance is reconciled with human rights. Dying, as well as killing, seems ethically defensible, because all parties enter the fatal bargain by choice.

¹⁷ Annette Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 204.

¹⁸ Kevin J. Harty, Preface, in *The Vikings on Film: Essays on Depictions of the Norse Middle Ages*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 1.

In order to deflect some of the lingering uneasiness about pagan rituals from the more sympathetic and heroic Viking characters, each of these works conjures a sin-eater, a deformed agent of the sacrifice, whose physical ugliness, like a plastic mold, embodies our inescapable revulsion of the practice. In *The 13th Warrior* and “Burial of the Dead,” the Angel of Death seems herself like a living corpse. The eyeless face of the disfigured Seer in “Sacrifice” recalls the nightmare visage of the “Mouth of Sauron” in Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. The natives in *Valhalla Rising*, with thick orange paint caked on their skins, look like creatures that rose from the mud of a savage frontier. These loathsome figures function as a kind of moral safety valve, allowing us to hate the act of killing while still accepting the religious and social system that sustains human sacrifice.

The moral reconciliation rehearsed in Viking dramas reflects a compulsion to address the fundamental ethical difficulty that human sacrifice has posed to Western culture. We find accounts of sacrifice, both real and imagined, at the core of some of the most violent spasms of history, often functioning as a justification for war or genocide. In an ecclesiastical debate held at Valladolíd in 1550 to decide whether education or enslavement would best serve to convert Native Americans to Christianity, the Dominican scholar Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda cited human sacrifice as an offence against nature and a primary argument for the forcible conversion of them.¹⁹ Blood libel has similarly motivated European anti-Semitism since the Middle Ages, fueling the Holocaust, pogroms, and many local outbreaks of violence against Jews.

In this context of religious history and conflict, human sacrifice has presented a difficult paradox to Christian ideology. On one hand, it constitutes a central part of its founding myth. We may easily envision Jesus and Domaldi as two faces of the same archetypal figure: a king embracing his death for the salvation of his people. On the other hand, it has furnished Christianity with a capital indictment against a broad host of enemies, including Jews, pagans, heretics, witches, Native Americans, and Satanists. Refn dramatizes this paradox in *Valhalla Rising* with the character of an unregenerate pagan who scoffs at the notion of a Christian crusade: “These followers of the white Christ. I once met a man who told me that they eat their own god. Eat his flesh, drink his blood. Abominable.”

Faithful Christians recognize no such abomination in their theology, largely because the Gospels portray Jesus, like Larsson’s Domaldi and the sacrificial victims in *The 13th Warrior*, *Vikings*, and *Valhalla Rising*, as a passive but consenting participant in his own death. At least two moments in

¹⁹ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, *Tratado sobre las Justas Causas de la Guerra contra los Indios*, trans. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo and Manuel García-Pelayo (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1941), 155.

the Crucifixion narrative affirm Christ's willingness to die. Praying in Gethsemane, he says: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."²⁰ Later, as Jesus hangs on the cross, he ignores the onlookers who taunt: "Let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him."²¹ This crucial notion of the willingness of the sacrificial victim suggests the reason that Sepúlveda and other Christians could ritually celebrate the sacrifice of Christ while condemning the ritual sacrifices of the Aztec and Maya. We do not imagine Jesus accepting his bitter cup in Gethsemane or resisting the temptation to come down from the cross in the same way that we imagine the countless slaves dragged to Mesoamerican ziggurats to spill their blood for Queztalcoatl or Kukulcan. In this way, *The 13th Warrior*, *Vikings*, and *Valhalla Rising* render a subtly Christianized version of pagan ritual, even as they propose to confront the most "pagan" element of Norse life.

By muting the most dissonant notes of paganism with shadings of Christianity, *The 13th Warrior*, *Vikings*, and *Valhalla Rising* avoid putting the viewer in the position of having to make an ethical judgment against paganism or the past, easing our commercial consumption of Vikings with a kind of moral suasion. The films let us gawk at pre-Christian beliefs without challenging us to face them on their own terms, or to understand the long historical process of conflict and reconciliation between Christianity and paganism. In this respect, recent portrayals of the Vikings miss the chance to explore the similarities and differences in the ways that these two religious visions understand the fundamental categories of existence – life and death, sacrifice and regeneration, god and nature – that structure all ethical perspectives.

We can imagine other versions of these works that adapt Ibn Fadlān, Adam of Bremen, and Snorri Sturluson more literally: Antonio Banderas cringing when he hears the choked screams of the slave girl as she is pinned and strangled; Leif begging for his life as Ragnar's warriors bear him to the altar; One-Eye hunted down and burned by his companions, who think they need to give him to Odin or to Christ in order to find their way back from Hell. We can likewise imagine a different version of *Midwinterblot*, one that would never hang above the staircase in the National Museum, in which Domaldi submits to the knife not with an expectant gaze toward Valhalla, but bound and terrified. No nation could admit this scene as part of its national story, just as few audiences could accept versions of *The 13th Warrior*, *Vikings*, and *Valhalla Rising* that portrayed the most troubling aspects of Norse religion.

²⁰ Matthew 26:39 (New International Version). See also Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42.

²¹ Matthew 27:42 (New International Version). See also Mark 15: 30–31 and Luke 24:35.

We might consider these productions, with their gory titillations, sensational or even amoral. From the more fascinating perspective of the millennial struggles and syntheses between paganism and Christianity, however, they seem too dull, too plastic, to serve as instruments for ethical or historical understanding.

Meat Puzzles: *Beowulf* and Horror Film

Nickolas Haydock

What would an ocean be without a monster lurking in the dark?
It would be like sleep without dreams. (Werner Herzog)

Brought face to face at last with her monstrous antagonist, the redoubtable Ripley of *Alien 3* (1992) shivers in disgust as viscous drool oozes from the xenomorph's lipless mouth. In a comparatively restrained image from *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Hannibal the Cannibal Lector noisily sucks saliva through his teeth, describing with relish how he once ate a census taker's liver, "with fava beans and a nice chianti." These images seethe with the horror film's voracious appetite for terror and revulsion, its slaverling abjectness. No surprise at all, then, to find Wealhtheow falling victim to goo dripping from Grendel's lopsided maw in the 2007 *Beowulf*. In *Outlander* (2008), the warrior-princess Freya suffers a similar breach of bodily containment when the creature's saliva slops down onto her face as she lies upon a hill of human meat. An unacknowledged *Beowulf* analogue from the 1970s bears the delicate title *Raw Meat* (1973), wherein the lone descendant of a band of cannibals lives with his pregnant paramour in a tunnel beneath the London tube. The night stalker raids the tubes above to feed his family, desperate to carry on his line. His single weak spot is a livid, swollen ear, which a potential victim strikes in order to incapacitate him, releasing a stream of gore – an idea deliberately echoed in the hero's fight with Grendel in Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf* (2007).

In *Beowulf and Grendel* (2005), "the troll" raises an altar to his father's severed head, which he reverences by strewing the remains of his victims on the floor beneath – a mise-en-scène borrowed straight from the hut of Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13th, Part 2* (1981). Likewise, *Beowulf and Grendel's merewyf*, at first visible only as a webbed and taloned hand which tries to pull Vikings from their ship, is in homage to a signature shot from the horror

classic, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). At the end of *Friday the 13th* (1980), Jason emerges from the lake in an attempt to pull the Final Girl, who has just beheaded his mother with a machete, from her boat down into the watery depths where he apparently resides. Whereas in *Friday the 13th, Part 3*, it is “the Lady in Lake,” Mrs Voorhees, who rises from the bottom and the dead to drag yet another Final Girl beneath the surface. As is widely recognized, *Friday the 13th* inverted the mother–son relationship in Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), which gave birth to the modern sub-genre of the Slasher film, but its mythic substructure – a mother’s revenge for the death of her child, and the lake which holds revenant zombies waiting to waken in a slough of sequels – rather obviously updates the first half of *Beowulf*.

The venerable horror trope of an unmasking that reveals a monster beneath the mask (e.g., *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Friday the 13th*, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*) was freshened up for a scene in *The 13th Warrior* (1999), where a bear mask is pulled back to reveal the face of a Neanderthal. Generally speaking, the cinematic roots of this film stretch back to the Universal horror film *The Wolf Man* of 1941, which modeled Lon Chaney’s make-up on reconstructions of Neanderthal man.¹ In the 1999 *Beowulf* a door tightly bolted in one shot is discovered mysteriously ajar in the next, faithfully reproducing a ubiquitous horror film *topos*, one which in its failures to exclude or contain is emblematic of the genre as a whole. Roger Corman’s *The House of Usher* (1960) features doors locked and unlocked in practically every scene as an objective correlative for the undead and the return of the repressed. Indeed, Graham Baker’s *Beowulf* owes a debt to many adaptations of Edgar Allen Poe (e.g., *The Pit and the Pendulum*), not least at the beginning of the film where a gigantic straight razor severs victims in half. At the end of the film, the neo-gothic castle implodes in homage to the concluding scene from *The House of Usher*. The DVD box cover for *Outlander* quotes the Boston Herald critic James Verniere’s characterization of the film as “*Beowulf* Meets *Predator*,” though a more accurate version of the blurb would run: “*Alien* vs. *Predator* in Viking Age Denmark.”

This latest installment of *Beowulf* adaptations in its derivations from hugely successful horror franchises only confirms the impression assembled piece by gory piece above: namely, that all of these films are essentially amalgams of the *Beowulf*-meets-horror-films type. Many more examples of cross-

¹ Another classic film from 1960, Ingmar Bergman’s *Virgin Spring*, inspired its own uncanny doubles in Wes Craven’s hyper-violent, influential *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and the related revenge film, *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978). Similarly, the expressionless white face of Death in *Seventh Seal* (1957) looks forward to the equally cold, white mask of Michael Myers in the *Halloween* franchise, Jason’s hockey mask in the *Friday the 13th* franchise and the white, ghost mask used by a number of serial killers in the *Scream* franchise.

breeding between *Beowulf* and horror films will be adduced in the course of this article. But at the outset it may be useful to state plainly that (despite admixtures from other genres like action-adventure or science fiction) *Beowulf* films are predominantly horror films. To see the Old English poem from the perspective of horror is neither perverse nor simply a concession to the Hollywood system of genres. It foregrounds a dominant characteristic of *Beowulf* that continues to linger only at the margins of much academic scholarship, despite the warnings of Tolkien and his successors, namely, that the monsters – not genealogy, archeology, history, or religion – are the center of the poem. These films encourage us to refocus our attention back unto the garish, nightmarish qualities of the poem.

Monsters and Meaning: Horror Theory and Beowulf Films

The poet was, it seems to me, attempting to evoke in his audience the sensation of terror that is experienced in nightmares [...] these techniques are similar to those used by modern writers of horror fiction, and indeed by makers of horror films.

(Michael Lapidge, “*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror”)²

My analysis rests first of all on the abundant, ubiquitous details scattered throughout these films taken from the generic arsenal of the horror film, such as the desultory comparisons enumerated above. The prevalence of such details gives some weight to the contention that *Beowulf* films should be understood chiefly as horror films. More central to my approach, however, are recent theoretical explanations of the genre’s structure and enduring appeal, which, when applied to *Beowulf* films, render many cinematic divagations from the text explicable. As such, this article contributes to the growing critical discourse on adaptation by exploring the ways in which medium-specific genres and sub-genres inflect the adaptation of canonical literary texts.

Any survey of horror theory should perhaps begin with the work of Robin Wood, who dubbed the 1970s a “Golden Age of the American horror film” and did as much as anyone to initiate the serious study of these films.³ For Wood, horror films represent “our collective nightmares”;⁴ specifically,

² Michael Lapidge, “*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror,” in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.*, ed. Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), 373–402.

³ Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan ... and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, rev. ed. 2003), 63.

⁴ Wood, *Hollywood*, 70.

these nightmares work to expose the weakness of “surplus repression,” which functions to produce “monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists.”⁵ Collective nightmares are based on a simple formula: “normality is threatened by the Monster.”⁶ Wood’s monsters are embodiments of societal *oppression*, boogeymen who maintain a parallel, internalized existence as the subjects of psychological *repression*. Quite simply, monsters represent the “other” in Wood’s theory: the other people with whom one interacts throughout a system of unequal power relations – other cultures and ethnic groups, women and feminine sexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality, alternatives to reigning ideologies, and children. To this tension between self-identity and the other (familiar from Lacanian psychoanalysis and evocative of Sartre’s famous remark that “hell is other people”) Wood adds a third variable, “the relationship between normality and the Monster,” which he deems “the essential subject of the horror film.”⁷ Cinematic horror typically mediates tension between self and other through introduction of this third variable: “the doppelgänger, alter ego, or double.”⁸

Recent work on what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen calls “Monster Theory” confirms and extends Wood’s triadic model to monsters in general and to *Beowulf* in particular. Here is Cohen’s chilling account of Grendel’s last visit to Heorot:

The door splinters at the giant’s touch, and Grendel strides into the hall. The men still sleep. He seizes Hondscio, the nearest warrior, and guts him as he dreams. The giant rips the body to pieces, “*bat ban-locan, blod edrum dranc, / synsnædum sweall*” (bit into muscles, swilled blood from veins, tore off gobbets). The giant eats the sleeper alive, everything, “*fet ond folma*” (even hands and feet). The fear that animates this gory evisceration is that all that is rhetorically outside, incorporated into the body of the monster, will suddenly break through the fragile architecture of the hall, which is the fragile identity of the subject, and expose its surprised inhabitants to what has been abjected from their small world to make it livable.⁹

Cohen’s fluid elisions of objective and subjective, the hall and the head (hall = identity of the subject), are Wood’s oppression and repression given mate-

⁵ Wood, *Hollywood*, 64.

⁶ Wood, *Hollywood*, 71.

⁷ Wood, *Hollywood*, 71.

⁸ Wood, *Hollywood*, 71.

⁹ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 7–8.

rial form, as these forces function in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon culture more generally. The monster disrupts normality, its exclusion (in the terms of Deleuze and Guatarri) works like a machine in the re-production of social and psychological orders.

Michael Lapidge's "*Beowulf* and the Psychology of Terror" (1993) was perhaps the first thoroughgoing attempt to challenge the traditional categorization of the poem as "heroic poetry." Lapidge linked the illusive description of Grendel with the qualities of nightmares and suggested that the poet's style was designed to "evoke in his audience the sensation of terror."¹⁰ This much is certainly evident in Grendel's approach to Heorot. The monster's stealthy, gliding advance rendered through the repetition of *com* (702, 710, 720) heightens the terror "almost as in a nightmare."¹¹ Grendel is described as a *sceadugenga* (703) and his attacks as *nihthealu* (193) – terms that may be intended to associate his spectral visitations with a medical term for nightmares, *nihtgenga*. Yet Lapidge also recognizes the decidedly embodied, objective nature of Grendel's attacks – heads bitten off, bone locks broken – as well as the monster's physical, mortal nature. This slippage between nightmares and monsters, Lapidge argues, is a part of Anglo-Saxon ontology. It is also a staple of horror films, e.g., the *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday 13th* franchises, as Robin Wood's focus on the freakish interchanges in horror between objective and subjective, oppression and repression, makes readily apparent.

Doppelgängers or alter egos, whose presence encroaches upon boundaries between self and other, typically embody Wood's third variable – the relationship between normality and the monster. Recent uses of monster theory emphasize the similarities between *Beowulf* and Grendel, just as earlier myth and archetypal criticism did. For David D. Gilmore, "monsters and heroes arise simultaneously [...] as paired twins" and their conflict amounts to a "virtually universal" "combat myth of civilization's origins."¹² "Each monster narrative," as Richard Kearney reminds us, "recalls that the self is never secure in itself."¹³

Many *Beowulf* scholars remain uncomfortable with the notion that *Beowulf* and the monsters are doubles of one another for the very weighty reason that monsters are the enemies of God. Still, the poem encourages their partial identification through the use of similar vocabulary, humanizing the

¹⁰ Lapidge, "Psychology," 391.

¹¹ Lapidge, "Psychology," 384.

¹² David D. Gilmore, *Evil Beings: Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 27.

¹³ Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

monsters and emphasizing Beowulf's superhuman size and strength. Grendel especially is described in ways that seem designed to evoke sympathy: he is a "wonsæli wer" (unhappy man, 105), a wretched exile "earmsceapen/ on weres wæstmum wræclastas træd" (the misshapen one trod the paths of exile in a man's form, 1351–52).¹⁴ Although the reason for Grendel's "feud" with Hrothgar is never specified in the poem, the reciprocities of feud become crystal clear in the concatenations of revenge that begin with the death of Handscio. Beowulf revenges that death by dismembering Grendel and hanging his arm within the hall as a trophy of victory. Grendel's mother requites this, despoiling the trophy and placing the head of her victim Aeschere on a hill above her mere. Beowulf descends into the mere, beheads the mother, and then Grendel's death-sick corpse, whose head is returned to Heorot. Though there is no doubt that Beowulf contends against the enemies of God, themselves the progeny of Cain's transgression, the hero's battles with monsters take on the character of a never-ending feud that mirrors human blood feuds, their monstrous, *undead* nature: feud is thus the most haunting of revenants.

In this sense Beowulf's actions closely mirror those of the monsters, perhaps nowhere more than at the end when he has the treasure from the dragon's hoard piled up within his own tomb. Indeed, it might well be said that it is only the gigantic and inhumanely powerful hero, in his mediation between men and monsters, that allows the logic of monstrosity – its dark reflection of human societies – to emerge so sharply within the poem. Thus, reciprocity, the pattern of imitation and escalation, serves to represent not only the mimetic structure of feud in René Girard's terms but also the psychic bipolarities of Lacan whereby the self originates in the other.¹⁵

Still, few would argue that the hero of the poem emerges as anything but Grendel's implacable enemy, a warrior who fights on the side of God and on whose side God himself lends a hand (or a sword) against a demon from hell descended from Cain. In film adaptations of *Beowulf*, the line between good and evil is deliberately and much more thoroughly blurred: doubles and doppelgängers multiply with promiscuous abandon. *Outlander* (2008), for instance, goes so far as to christen its exilic Beowulf-figure *Kainan*, a soldier engaged in genocide whose spaceship crashes into eighth-century Denmark,

¹⁴ See: Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 29–34. All quotations of *Beowulf* are taken from: Klaeber's *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 4th ed., ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

¹⁵ References are to: René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), and Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981).

laden (*Alien*-like) with a trio of secret sharers who serve as the film's version of the son, mother, and dragon. This sci-fi frame sets the stage for quite a conventional horror film in which the hero and the monster are a package deal – Kainan is initially treated as an enemy by Hrothgar's tribe and later leads the initiative to rid them of a curse he has brought down upon their heads. Kainan serves as a kind of hybrid, then, of Cain, Beowulf, and the thief.

The 1999 *Beowulf*, with Christopher Lambert in the title role, represents a paradigmatic instance of the hero and monster as mirror images of one another, where the original poem's concern with genealogy is obliquely reconfigured through a series of back stories in which demons mate with human beings. As he faces off against Grendel, Beowulf lets the monster know that he has to do with something very different from simple human prey: "I've been waiting for you. One of us is the other's death. I'm like you. I'm one of the damned." Thereby loaded down with Grendel's burden, who *Godes yrre bær* (711), this cursed Beowulf wanders the earth in search of evil.

Soon thereafter in a twisted form of foreplay he recounts for his lover, Kyra, the strangely elfish idyll behind his Manichean origins. His mother followed a strange light through a hole in the mountain that magically opened at her approach. There she encounters "Bale, the God of Darkness, Lord of Lies" and sleeps with him every night for three months. On the last night she is told that she is with child and must name the boy Beowulf – or perhaps *Bale-wolf*, as the name is typically pronounced in the film. Thus it is that he comes to be "trapped between two worlds": "The only thing that stops me from becoming evil is fighting evil." Here we witness a telling conflation of comic-book superheroes with the Bear's Son folktale as told of Bödvar Bjarki in *Hrolfs Saga Kraki*. More integral to the film's psychoanalytical supernatural is the notion that Grendel and Beowulf are specular images of one another, products of human/demonic miscegenation: Grendel, the son of Hrothgar and a shape-shifting succubus "older than sin"; Beowulf, the offspring of a human mother and the demon, Bale.

Grendel was conceived "at the height of victorious bloodlust," when Hrothgar conquered the land and took its queen as a prize of conquest. Employing the terms of Robin Wood, the doubling of Beowulf and the monster constitutes a textbook case of the dual functioning of oppression and repression. Grendel is the offspring of imperial oppression, such that Hrothgar is haunted by the embodiment of a furious resentment he himself sired. On the other hand, Beowulf's battles are chiefly internal: he attempts to control the forces of evil that gave birth to his supernatural strength, warring like Grendel against his father, in order to repress an evil bred in the bone. The succubus appeals to this dark side in her attempts to have her way with him:

(Grendel's mother appears when Beowulf finally kills Grendel, who has just killed his father Hrothgar.)

Grendel's Mother: That was a mistake.

Beowulf: No mistake. I only kill when I have to. You kill for pleasure.

GM: Their blood was sweet. I sucked their veins. Chewed their bones – wet and still alive. Hot blood pumping down my throat. (sucks her bloody fingers in a shot deriving from pornographic depictions of oral sex) You should try it, it will appeal to you.

B: You know nothing about what appeals to me.

GM: Don't I? How will her (Kyra's) blood taste? You've wondered; you can't help it. You look at her and your blood pumps. Your mouth becomes wet. You haven't confused that hunger for something else, I hope.

B: I'm not confused. I know exactly why I'm here.

GM: (Moving closer to Beowulf, circling round him, touching his lips with her bloody fingers.) Tell me, whose blood mingles with yours? Who spread your mother's legs and gave you the strength to overcome my son?

B: Someone stronger than you.

GM: (with a scornful laugh) That's doubtful. I know you feel the pull towards me. You can't help it. I need you inside me. You're on the edge of control now. With fresh kills only inches away. And me so close – aching for you. Does it burn in you, the hunger ... for blood, for flesh? Is it sweet to you the scent of my son's kills? Tell me, hero, whose world do you really belong to, theirs or mine?

"I need you inside me": here, Layla Roberts seems to reference rather explicitly soft-core horror porn such as *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, 1983), as well as the more recent, hugely successful *Interview with the Vampire* (1994).¹⁶ When the seduction fails, she unfolds herself, metamorphosing into a gigantic scorpion that retains a human face. As such, Beowulf's final monster offers an example of "body horror," a sub-category that has received much attention lately. The horror that emerges from the body and the remnants of human form that survive its transformation will receive some discussion below, as will concerns with gender and family.

But let us return to that weirdly excessive hybrid composed of a woman, a dragon-like scorpion whose blood is flammable, and her son, whose gaseous, purple life-force flows back into her body after his death. Hybrids are the stock and trade of horror. The Sphinx was a similar tri-morph made up of

¹⁶ Vastly superior to both of these is Chan-wook Park's *Thirst* (original title *Bakjwi*, 2009).

a woman's face, a lion's body, and the wings of a large raptor. The Medusa, herself part of a trio of sisters called the Gorgons, featured snakes for hair and a long tongue sticking out of her mouth – both of which signaled her apotropaic function in Greek myth, the terrifying power of her gaze to turn men into stone. Whatever the creature featured at the end of Baker's *Beowulf* is supposed to represent anatomically, she seems, like the Sphinx, to pose a neck riddle that the hero must solve in order to defeat her. Also, like the Medusa, she possesses the mortal threat of the stultifying feminine gaze. The latter supposition finds support in the manner of her attacks on Beowulf. She makes no real effort to wound him, she simply pins him down and gazes into his eyes, tongue jutting far out of her mouth and her hair re-coiffured into snake-like braids pulled tightly back from her face.

Freud's famous remarks on "Medusa's Head" saw the specter of the Medusa's gaze as a castration terror brought on by revelation of the mother's sexuality and her lack of a penis, while the hair/snakes in a sense compensate for this lack, according to a "technical rule" whereby "a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration."¹⁷ In Baker's *Beowulf* the monster's transformation from a woman offering, even demanding sex to a grotesque monster threatening to incorporate the man begins as a rash of protruding, snake-like phalloi emerging from her arms, legs, abdomen, and pelvis – protrusions that quickly develop dangerous elaborations into bat-like wings with tusk-like nails. Throughout she calls Beowulf "child" and even after her transformation continues to speak as if she were offering to incorporate him as a form of transcendent sex: "Come, child, sample the true delights of flesh with me. Feel what no human woman can offer you." At this point, Beowulf draws his sword.

Threats to masculinity bring us closer to more recent, gender-based readings of Medusa, which emphasize her status as a woman raped by Poseidon within Athena's temple and the goddess's terrible punishment of the victim. Like Medusa, Baker's apotropaic monster has reason to be angry with men. Hrothgar took her and her land, and she took her revenge by repeatedly raping him in his sleep and bearing the child that becomes his scourge. In the course of an inside-out transformation, her breasts (much in evidence throughout) and vagina disappear, exfoliating into beastly talons in a horrific variation on that other Freudian nightmare, the vagina dentate.

But what of her symbolic role as Sphinx, a tri-form being who ultimately unites in a single body all three of Beowulf's monsters? There is good reason to associate the figure in the film with Lilith and her reflexes in Jewish

¹⁷ Marjorie Garber and Nancy J. Vickers, *The Medusa Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 85.

and related ancient and medieval traditions. Certainly her claim that she is “older than sin” would seem to put her genesis before that of Eve. Equally intriguing is the film’s recurrent scenes of nocturnal emission as Grendel’s mother writhes atop Hrothgar in sexual bliss, a commonplace in traditions about Lilith and her Greco-Roman incarnation, Lamia, which Matthew Lewis adapted for an especially lurid scene in *The Monk*. The related Mesopotamian demon Labartu had a scorpion between her legs, just as a scorpion’s stinger emerges from the privy regions of Grendel’s mother in the film. Later literary traditions such as the Pre-Raphaelites emphasized Lilith/Lamia’s vampirism, a trait especially foregrounded in the film. Perhaps most important for our purposes are the medieval notions, beginning in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, which cast Lilith as Adam’s first wife and later Jewish texts which claim she left Adam because she refused to be subservient to him.

The point of hunting such analogues really has more to do with the kind of response the 1999 *Beowulf* solicits from audiences than with archetypal or myth criticism *sensu stricto*. The poem poses its own share of mysteries: why cannot Grendel approach the *gifstol*, and why, since she is proportionally smaller and weaker, does Grendel’s mother represent the greater threat to the hero? This film, like nearly every other of its ilk, offers answers to such questions while spawning many more enigmas. Every major character has a secret – Grendel, his mother, Beowulf, Hrothgar, Kyra, and Roland – and the plot is chiefly dedicated to the unraveling of these mysteries in the long interludes between monster fights. The three-in-one riddle of succubus is the chief of these riddles, but all the characters pose questions of identity and origins. Hrothgar’s wife and Kyra’s husband are conspicuously absent, both (it turns out) suffered violent deaths because of their spouses. Grendel is the son of Hrothgar and the succubus, which explains his reply “Not you” when Hrothgar impotently pleads with the monster: “Fight me, fight me, dammit.” But it is intimated that the scorpion-dragon is also Hrothgar’s child, conceived not at a single moment of “victorious bloodlust” (as was Grendel), but over the course of many tempestuous wet dreams during which she coaxes the king: “It is almost finished, my love.” Finally brought to term, the hybrid unites all three monsters and seeks to add the force of Beowulf to its composite body, first by seduction and then by ingestion – though that is perhaps a distinction with no real difference here.

That the final incarnation of the creature retains Layla Roberts’ face pays homage to famous images of body horror in films such as John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) and George P. Cosmatos’ *Leviathan* (1989), just as the bursting forth of the creature from within a human host in all of these films looks back to the *Alien* franchise. In these examples of body horror the monsters-are-us theme emerges from the fear of science under capitalism. For Deleuze and Guatarri, Oedipal complexes and the hysterical, monstrous

feminine are products of bourgeois capitalism, however insistently their *auctoritas* is attributed to classical and biblical myth.¹⁸ According to Robin Wood, the monsters of 1970s horror films represent the family under capitalism, and this is relevant too for many film *Beowulfs*. In Baker's *Beowulf*, Grendel's mother is the *other* woman in more ways than one, a husband's fatal attraction that ultimately claims the lives of his wife and all of his people except the final girl, Kyra. According to the Internet Movie Database, Kyra's character was originally slated to take the monster Grendel as her lover. The scene was reportedly dropped because it detracted from the plot; one can speculate that the incest theme was included in the first place because it contributed to the film's central concern: the fracture of the nuclear family by uncontrolled desires, both incestuous and acquisitive, although this too may well be a distinction without any real difference. Until it is proven not to be the case, Kyra assumes that Grendel is a revenant of her husband, whom she stabbed to death. Kyra's unscreened monster love – as well as the scene late in the film where she reconciles with her father in his bedroom after pulling that same knife on him – suggests (in tune with Deleuze and Guattari) how incest prohibitions are constitutive of the nuclear family under capitalism.

The violation of these prohibitions assumes monstrous forms that embody forbidden desires and hybrid offspring (for instance, the Sphinx, the Medusa, the Minotaur, Lilith, monsters born of the union of giants and women, and the succubus in Baker's *Beowulf*). Heorot is a house haunted by a secret sin, the colonist's ethnocide that established Hrothgar's reign in the first place. That terror is revisited upon him and his kingdom in the form of a son who embodies the rampant bloodlust of the father. As a kind of vanishing mediator between the self and the social, the family's founding imperatives – monogamy, reproduction, sexual prohibitions – produce an embodied *jouissance* of infidelity, incest, and miscegenation, which must be destroyed in order to return the reign of the family. In Robin Wood's terms, the ending of the 1999 *Beowulf* squares the circle in yielding at the end only two survivors united in a monogamous relationship, Beowulf and Kyra – like Adam and Eve with flames behind and all the world ahead of them. Although this romantic ending has nothing at all to do with the Old English poem, it does reinstitute the compulsory (and compulsive) heterosexual monogamy that Robin Wood specifies as the *telos* of the classic horror film.

¹⁸ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Marks Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 51–138.

Fear and Disgust: Noël Carroll's Theory of Horror

Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror* represents perhaps the most theoretically astute account of the genre's trade in fear and revulsion, and the paradox of its enduring appeal.¹⁹ Carroll asks quite simply: "why horror?" in attempting to account for our enjoyment of images designed to elicit *un-pleasurable* emotions. He begins by defining a mode called "art horror," which is thought to straddle many media, including fiction, film, painting, and drama. Carroll's neo-Aristotelian approach works to distill a general theory of horror based upon the affective responses such works are designed to elicit in their audiences and the challenges monsters present to established cultural categories. Carroll distinguishes what he calls "art-horror" from real fear, suggesting that our identification is chiefly with the fearful reactions of characters within the fiction. As such, the rather thorny question of whether many horror films are really scary or for whom they are frightening is gracefully sidestepped. Horror films are those that elicit an audience's responses to that which is frightening, abject, and threatening *to characters within the film*. Taking a page from Aristotle's definition of tragedy as productive of pity and fear, Carroll adapts a formula from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*: monsters are interstitial beings that confound epistemological categories (e.g., human/animal; living/dead) in order to provoke fear and disgust.²⁰ Also analogous to Aristotle's anatomy of the structure of tragic plots (*peripatetia*, *anagnorisis*, and *catharsis*) is Carroll's contention that most examples of art-horror are based upon a "drama of investigation" leading to knowledge and a restoration of cultural order:

Horror stories, in a significant number of cases, are dramas of proving the existence of the monster and disclosing (most often gradually) the origin, identity, purposes and powers of the monster. Monsters, as well, are obviously a perfect vehicle for engendering this kind of curiosity

¹⁹ Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

²⁰ "If what is of primary importance about horrific creatures is that their very impossibility vis a vis our conceptual categories is what makes them function so compellingly in dramas of discovery and confirmation, then their disclosure, insofar as they are categorical violations, will be attached to some sense of disturbance, distress, and disgust. Consequently, the role of the horrific creature in such narratives – where their disclosure captures our interest and delivers pleasure – will simultaneously mandate some probable revulsion. That is, in order to reward our interest by the disclosure of the putatively impossible beings of the plot, said beings ought to be disturbing, distressing, and repulsive in the way that theorists like Douglas predict phenomena that ill fit cultural classifications will be" (Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 184). Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* was first published in 1962 by Routledge (London and New York).

and for supporting the drama of proof, because monsters are (physically, though generally not logically) impossible beings. They arouse interest and attention through being putatively inexplicable or highly unusual vis-à-vis our standing cultural categories, thereby instilling a desire to learn and to know about them. And since they are also outside of (justifiably) prevailing definitions of what is, they understandably prompt a need for proof (or the fiction of a proof) in the face of skepticism. Monsters are, then, natural subjects for curiosity, and they straightforwardly warrant the ratiocinative energies the plot lavishes upon them.²¹

In this, Carroll's approach complements that of Wood, who proposed a triad of normality, the monster, and the relation between them, often figured by doppelgängers or alter egos.

Where Carroll parts company with Wood is in the latter's valorization of the monster's heroic qualities to challenge normalcy and the nuclear family. Carroll is understandably hesitant to follow Wood here, because while many monsters (Frankenstein, the Wolf Man, and the Grendel of *Beowulf and Grendel* or *No Such Thing*) encourage our sympathy, even admiration, many others elicit only fear and disgust: the monsters of *The 13th Warrior* and *Grendel*, for instance. As noted at the beginning of this essay, the heroines Wealhtheow and Freya shuddering in revulsion at digestive juices drooling from slaving maws is emblematic of the horror film's influence on film *Beowulfs*. Yet another, more prevalent characteristic is these films' indulgence of our curiosities about the monsters, their investigations into the origins, nature, motivations, and even the psychology of Grendel or Grendel's mother. The monsters in *The 13th Warrior* represent one extreme, the Neanderthal cannibals known within the film as "Eaters of the Dead," who are beyond identification or sympathy. At the opposite extreme prowls the quite human "troll" of *Beowulf and Grendel*, a victim of scapegoating who strictly confines his attacks to those who have injured him and is easily the most sympathetic male figure in the film. Yet, however different the levels of empathy their monsters elicit, both films are equally invested in what Carroll calls "dramas of proof" in which the heroes along with the audience laboriously gather evidence as a prelude to, indeed as means of, defeating the monster.

Just as art horror often proceeds like a scientific investigation into the nature and origins of the creature as a means to combat it, *Beowulf* films have aped and mimicked scholarly investigations into the poem and its

²¹ Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 182.

backgrounds. In sum, both John McTiernan's *The 13th Warrior* and Sturla Gunnarsson's *Beowulf and Grendel* construct a Rosetta stone capable of translating the supernatural terms of the poem into historical realities. In *The 13th Warrior*, Ahmed ibn Fadlan – a stranger in a strange land – is initially skeptical that the Wendol represent anything more than an enemy tribe whose furiousness has led to beliefs that they are impervious to weapons – not unlike in this respect the legends about berserkers with which Crichton was certainly familiar. Yet, although Crichton's novel²² and the film's screenplay (by William Wisher, Jr. and Warren Lewis) leverage anthropology and evolutionary biology to an extent unprecedented in movie medievalism, the science is just as fanciful as that in *Jurassic Park* or *Timeline*, a science that disrupts chronological distinctions and puts the present under the threat of a distant past.

Science serves to rationalize the monsters of *The 13th Warrior* in the most fanciful of ways, just as it typically does in horror fiction and films. The myth that Crichton invents as a backdrop to the poem, the idea of “creatures of the mist,” certainly reaches back through Tolkien's “Misty Mountains” and the dragon Smaug, to H. Rider Haggard's *The People of the Mist* (1894) and its 1978 film adaptation *Slave of a Cannibal God*, but such cannibalistic clouds are also a staple of more recent horror films such as John Carpenter's *The Fog* (1980) and Frank Darcourt's *The Mist* (2007), based on a Steven King novel. In Crichton's later novel *Prey* (2002), a cloud of nanoparticles programmed as an irresistible predator capable of adapting to new conditions escapes from the laboratory to rain havoc on the world. Mists are such a staple of horror conceptions precisely because they represent how the unknown and unseen is embodied as a threat. It is Ahmed ibn Fadlan's role in the film to penetrate these mists, to ascertain the identity of these mythic creatures, and to discover the location of their lair in the Thunder Caves.²³

Much more realistic and requiring little suspension of disbelief is the Grendel of Sturla Gunnarsson's film *Beowulf and Grendel*. In Noël Carroll's terms, Beowulf is sidetracked into “a drama of proof” not unlike that of Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Grendel emerges from this investigation a man and a victim, not the demonic troll of motiveless malignity that Hrothgar and the other Danes insisted he was. Rather, he is the victim of scapegoating whose own victims pay the price established by the code of the feud, a being that is in fact more like Grettir the Strong of the Icelandic saga than this film's Beowulf – an outcast and outlaw whose

²² Michael Crichton, *The Eaters of the Dead* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

²³ A *Beowulf*-inspired episode in *Star Trek: Voyager* titled “Monsters and Heroes” substitutes a luminescent cloud for the Grendel-kin.

position at the extremities has made him a monster.²⁴ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's characterization of the abject Grendel, quoted earlier, is thus an even better description of Gunnarsson's film than it is of the poem, of "the fragile identity" of subjects exposed "to what has been abjected from their small world to make it livable."²⁵ The film succeeds in exposing the subtle dialectic of repression and oppression in ways truer to the psychoanalytic and anthropological subtexts of Cohen's monster theory (Lacan, Kristeva, Girard), because the monster's hybridity is explicable in neither divine nor evolutionary terms.

Films do pursue adaptations of texts that have more in common with the ways and means of professional scholarship than is often acknowledged, particularly because the same theorists who inspire a good deal of recent scholarship have also made their way into popular consciousness, just as recent theorists such as Žižek and Kristeva increasingly engage popular culture. When Cohen enlists support from the likes of Prospero and Dr Frankenstein ("This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine"), he also invites us to take the question of the existence of monsters seriously: "Monsters are our children ... a discourse all the more sacred as it comes from the outside."²⁶ The Hrothgars of the 1999 and the 2007 *Beowulf* actually do father monsters, as does Beowulf in the latter film. The orphaned Grendel of *Beowulf and Grendel* becomes Hrothgar's child in the metaphorical sense of parentage that Cohen employs, thus becoming "sacred" in the fullest sense of that word. The Hrothgar of the film *Grendel*, who sacrifices children to palliate the monsters, comes to realize that in offering child victims he himself has become a monster, the child (as it were) of Grendel – the idea that terror nourishes the monster within us seems especially relevant now. The Kainan of *Outlander* – the film's Beowulf – is also forced to acknowledge a thing of darkness his when his spaceship bears the Moorwen to Viking Age Iceland.

This, I hasten to add, is not to confuse Cohen's trend-setting work with that of screenwriters. These films are to theoretically informed scholarship as science fiction is to science. Yet the parallels between Beowulfian cinémedievalism and scholarship *are* intriguing, both in their manufacture of what Carroll calls "dramas of proof" and in the funhouse mirror such films hold up to *Beowulf* scholarship. *Beowulf* films conduct investigations into the histories and mechanisms of monsterization, seeking out the monsters' genesis, identity, motivations, and location, and thereby foregrounding the role of the abject in the production of normality. In the tabloid sense of the word,

²⁴ The equation of Grettir with Grendel has been explored in depth by Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 140–68.

²⁵ Cohen, *Of Giants*, 8.

²⁶ Cohen, *Of Giants*, 20.

the human beings in these films are haunted by their *pasts*, to such an extent that one regrets Vincent Price was not available for the role of Hrothgar. The scandals uncovered include adultery, genocide, human sacrifice, Oedipal dramas, and matriarchal cannibalism – exactly the kind of Gothic secrets revealed so ubiquitously in horror plotting and characterization. The corpus of film *Beowulfs* thus apes *Beowulf* scholarship through the conventions of the horror film.

Playing Up Female Parts: The Monstrous Feminine

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.

(Adrianne Rich)

The feminine in *Beowulf* films is deliriously overdetermined, significant in ways that egregious, values-added supplements in popular culture tend to be. The tendency to dismiss such elements as simple concessions to political correctness or industrial commonplaces forecloses their role in staging, often quite self-consciously, the translations of medieval texts into media and genre-specific codes. Put more directly, the female figures whose roles are added or expanded in *Beowulf* films represent more than love interests or woman warriors: they are instead part of a larger discourse on gendered violence and the abject maternal, those especially intense and interrelated concerns of the horror film. In her attempt to rethink gender in horror films through Julia Kristeva's book *The Powers of Horror*,²⁷ Barbara Creed remarks on the psychodynamics of identity and abjection:

In the child's attempts to break away, the mother becomes an abject; thus, in this context, where the child struggles to become a separate subject, abjection becomes "*a precondition of narcissism*." Once again we can see abjection at work in the horror text where the child struggles to break away from the mother, representative of the archaic maternal figure, in a context in which the father is inevitably absent (*Psycho*, *Carrie*, and *The Birds*). In these films the maternal is constructed as the monstrous feminine.²⁸

For Creed, Kristeva's speculation that abjection derives from ancient rituals of purification offers an opportunity to view modern horror as a social ritual

²⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine," in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002), 72.

through which the abject maternal is defeated in order to reassert the reign of the symbolic order.

John Gardner likely concluded that such a struggle was implicit in *Beowulf*. In *Grendel*, the finest and most widely influential piece of *Beowulfiana* ever composed, Gardner poses what Kristeva would call the “thetic break” as the chief stumbling block in the development of Grendel’s intense interiority – for monsters the mother herself is monstrous:

I sigh, sink into the silence, and cross it like the wind. Behind my back, at the world’s end, my pale, slightly glowing mother sleeps on, old, sick at heart, in our dingy, underground room. Life-bloated, baffled, long suffering hag. Guilty, she imagines, of some unremembered, perhaps ancestral crime. (She must have some human in her.) Not that she thinks. Not that she dissects and ponders the dusty mechanical bits of her miserable life’s curse. She clutches at me in sleep as if to crush me. “Why are we here?” I used to ask her. “Why do we stand this putrid, stinking hole?” She trembles at my words. Her fat lips shake. “Don’t ask!” her wiggling claws implore. (She never speaks.) “Don’t ask!” It must be some terrible secret, I used to think. I’d give her a crafty squint. She’ll tell me, in time, I thought. But she told me nothing.²⁹

Though Grendel continues to vet versions of Kristeva’s “symbolic” in the form of various philosophical schools, the mother’s body and her womb-like cave repeatedly threaten to suspend or reverse the thetic break, reincorporating him into a world before language or a distinct sense of self:

“The world resists me and I resist the world,” I said. “That is all there is.” [...] “I exist, nothing else.” Her face works. She gets up on all fours, brushing dry bits of bone from her path, and, with a look of terror, rising as if by unnatural power, she hurls herself across the void and buries me in her bristly fur and fat. I sicken with fear. [...] I can’t breathe, and I claw to get free. She struggles. I smell my mama’s blood and, alarmed, I hear from the walls and floor of the cave the booming, booming of her heart.³⁰

The sophisticated dragon, who may be the devil and fills the role of Grendel’s absent father, will prove equally terrifying for the fledgling existentialist

²⁹ John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 11.

³⁰ Gardner, *Grendel*, 28–29.

monster, but the abject maternal who threatens to overwhelm her offspring remains a continuing threat.

Grendel's mother threatens a chthonic recursiveness, a loss of the world of language, a threat to that narcissism that fathers identity. Yet even more distressing is Grendel's recognition near the end of the novel that he is the sign of his mother's lack, a sign of the absent phallus made apparent in a re-enactment of the thetic break:

I saw long ago the whole universe as not-my-mother, and I glimpsed my place in it, a hole. [...] For even my mama loves me not for myself, my holy specialness (he he ho ha), but for my son-ness, my possessed-ness, my displacement of air as visible proof of her power. I have set her aside – gently, picking her up by the armpits as I would a child – and so have proved that she has no power but the little I give her by momentary whim.³¹

Grendel's difficult passage into subjectivity occurs – as all such individuations must, according to Freud and Lacan – through identification with the father's superior strength and the law that he represents but cannot control. The nihilistic, materialistic, supremely narcissistic dragon serves this father-function for Grendel. However, the dragon himself is only another sign of the phallus, not the phallus itself, which certainly resides with that God whose existence the dragon tries desperately to disprove.

As we have seen, the abject maternal is abundantly evident in Graham Baker's gothic *Beowulf*, though the threat of the *chora* to masculinity has been sexed up. There, the body of Grendel's mother serves as both her son's tomb and as the womb in which the "dragon" is slowly incubated. Both center and gaping void of this version of the poem, Layla Roberts' monstrous mother calls Beowulf "child" as she invites him to enter her in a form of eroticized death familiar from vampire films. For the undead like herself and Beowulf, sexual desire is merely the *attenuated form* of a deeper, more elemental hunger – as she demonstrates by her lethal copulation with Beowulf's rival, Roland. The hero's insistence that he knows and can maintain the difference between these two forms of hunger thus initiates yet another thetic break, the reinstitution of the masculine symbolic as a bulwark against the looming dangers of the *chora*.³²

³¹ Gardner, *Grendel*, 158.

³² Indeed, Beowulf's melodramatic counterpart in this masculine, sexual control is the *Twilight* films' vampire Edward Cullen (Robert Pattinson). In *Twilight: Breaking Dawn, Part 1* (2011), the honeymoon suite is torn to pieces as a testament to the terrible strain of

The 2007 *Beowulf* follows the lead of the earlier film in casting Grendel's mother (Angelina Jolie) as a combination of siren and succubus, but Ms Jolie bathes in gold not blood. The association is as old perhaps as capitalism itself. Marx famously coined a vampire simile to highlight the undead nature of capital: "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."³³ Barack Obama took up this idea recently, accusing the venture capitalist *cum* presidential candidate Mitt Romney of "vampire capitalism." In the 2007 *Beowulf*, the eroticization of capital is made glamorous flesh, but the monstrous, threatening nature of motherhood is no less apparent. Like Layla Roberts' character, Jolie's incarnates feminine fertility as a threat to masculinity – she too is the mother not just of Grendel but of the dragon as well. There is no end to the masculine lust for power she embodies: unlike all earlier film versions of the character, this virago is seemingly immortal. Beowulf lies with her and lies too when he claims to have killed her. He, like Hrothgar, becomes her lover and sires the offspring that becomes his bane.

By such means do the monstrous mothers played by Roberts and Jolie represent both the phallus and its lack, for men. Their sons endow the monstrous feminine with the power to wield the phallus – in both cases almost as if by remote control – and at the same time to render impotent the kings from whom they have taken this power in something like a repetitive, compulsive curse. In this version of Oedipal triangulation the father is emasculated by his son, who becomes a powerful phallus in the hands of the mother, who in bearing a child reduces her lover to a donor and her son to an apparatus through which she wields her will in the world. The Hrothgars of both films cut very emptied, impotent, despairing figures indeed. Eventually, so does the Beowulf of the 2007 film, who as in no other film version is actually allowed to grow old, albeit in Denmark rather than Gotland. The waning of these powerful men is set alongside the golden girl, a succubus who never ages and never dies, and who transforms their lust for an eroticized power into a monstrous scandal.

In his thoroughly engaging history of the horror film, David J. Skal relates the body horror of Ridley Scott's landmark film *Alien* (1979) to reproductive anxieties:

The chest-bursting scene – the single most talked about sequence in the film – became the seventies' surpassing evocation of reproduction

suppressing Edward's bloodlust, barely held in check by his love for Bella Swan (Kristen Stewart).

³³ Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 342.

as unnatural parasitism [...] the fetus-as-bogeyman, an ever growing, shape-shifting nightmare. The culture's growing but shifting hostility toward birth is transformed into a monstrous fetal parasite hostile to the culture itself. *Alien* was a validation of something already suspected: that reproduction was a kind of death, a devastating insult to the body and personal autonomy. [...] Relief only came when the beast was aborted from the mother-ship's body, sucked away by the vacuum of space.³⁴

The 2007 *Beowulf* casts these "reproductive anxieties" in masculine terms. In the wake of the Monica Lewinski scandal, the impeachment proceedings against President Clinton and the Democratic loss of the presidency in 2000, the notion that adultery and lies about adultery could enfeeble a powerful man had, perhaps, an especial salience. Earlier comparisons of the Clinton presidency to Kennedy's now tended to reinforce the idea of two charismatic leaders whose credibility had been undermined by sexual secrets. Debilitating wars, first in Vietnam and then in Iraq and Afghanistan, wars that scarified beyond recognition America's moral authority and self-confidence, have seemed to many commentators the direct result of Kennedy's assassination and Clinton's fall from grace. Certainly the parallels are far from exact, but in Hrothgar's and Beowulf's adulteries, which swell to monstrous proportions and threaten to destroy their house on the hill, we may see the distant mirror of a characteristically American obsession with sex as the root of all evils.

If Grendel and the dragon suggest the scandalous return of sexual secrets, then Jolie's particular variation on the *femme fatale* represents fame and fortune in both medieval and modern senses of these words. Her femininity is monstrous precisely because it carries secrets to term rather than burying them forever. An embodiment of wealth and power, she retains the right (like the goddess Fortuna) to take away all she has given. When Beowulf descends to the underwater caves, he finds the gigantic Grendel shrunk to the shape and size of an aborted fetus, lying on a table. His mother, dripping with gold, embodies the material wealth of the hoard as well as its morbid *jouissance*. Her long golden ponytail serves as both a whip and an umbilical chord, reminiscent of the umbilical-like objects in classical *catabases*.³⁵

From the beginning of the episode, masculine and feminine symbols of

³⁴ David J. Skal, *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*, rev. ed. (New York: Faber and Faber, 2001), 301.

³⁵ See: Erling B. Holtzmark, "The *Katabasis* Theme in Modern Cinema," in *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23–50.

power are juxtaposed. Beowulf holds the radiant ornamental cup in one hand and his sword in the other – shot repeatedly from angles that make it seem a prosthetic penis. But this sword (like Hrunting in the original) makes little headway, passing without effect through her body, until she takes it into her hands in another broad reference to fellatio as emasculation ... and it melts away (like the divine sword in the poem). In this liquid dream world nothing is stable, rather – in the Kristevan sense of “woman’s time” – circular and repetitive. As she glides as if on a turntable around Beowulf’s naked body, her tail presents him with Grendel’s head, softly intoning:

You took a son from me. Give me a son, brave thane. Stay with me. Love me. Love me, and I shall weave you riches beyond imagination. I shall make you the greatest king that ever lived. (Tail releases the head and weaves itself through the golden cup in a tight shot of their pelvises.) As long as you hold me in your heart and this golden horn remains in my keeping (beginning to caress the sword), you will forever be king: forever strong, mighty, and all powerful. This I promise. (As the sword dissolves, oozing through her fingers.) This I swear. (As Beowulf lets the hilt fall to his side and the golden drops puddle into a reflection of their lovemaking.)

As the source of worldly power, the womb-like lair is the place where the phallus goes to die – or rather to be subsumed within the feminine. That the cave is where Beowulf gains seemingly unlimited power while at the same time being emasculated and rendered impotent – symbolically at least – adds a certain uncanny frisson to the Faustian bargain.

Later at the celebratory banquet at Heorot, Beowulf proffers Grendel’s head and tells how the mother came back to life when he pulled Hrunting from her chest – in a broad allusion to the stake of vampire legends. He claims the only way to keep her dead was to leave the sword within her body – a phantasmagoric victory of the phallus over the feminine that the film’s audience knows to be both a lie and an example of wishful thinking. As no suchthetic break has in fact occurred, Beowulf has established the *imaginary* nature of the phallus in a strictly Lacanian sense. This sense Hrothgar understands all too well. He quickly surmises that Beowulf has not killed the cover girl that the young hero calls a “hag,” and so knows as well the foolishness inherent in Beowulf’s claim that he has *escaped* her. The film substitutes a private conference between Beowulf and Hrothgar for the public sermon in the poem, all the better to reveal the tacit complicity of these men in a (supposed) secret about male power: it not only comes from the feminine but remains eternally subject to it. By killing Grendel, Beowulf has removed Hrothgar’s curse: “She is not my curse,” says the aged king, “not anymore,

not anymore.” No, she is Beowulf’s, a curse that manifests itself some fifty years later in the coming of the dragon, Beowulf’s son. In naming Beowulf his heir, Hrothgar of course ignores the poem’s location of the final battle with the dragon, but he strengthens our sense of masculinity’s compulsive (and emasculating) recursivity within the cycles of “woman’s time.”

After Hrothgar’s convenient suicide, Beowulf ages in an instant, becoming every bit as despairing as Hrothgar once was. He entreats the young invader Finn to kill him. When Finn does not accept the invitation to murder an unarmed man, Beowulf explains: “You know why you can’t kill me, my friend? ‘Cause I died many, many years ago when I was young.” When the dragon finally comes, it bears a fragmentary message reported to Beowulf by a dying Unferth: “the sins of the fathers.” Though seemingly a curtailed version of the biblical phrase, it is in fact more like a calque for *Caines cynne*, a name for the race of monsters in this and indeed in almost every *Beowulf* film. The dragon and his half-brother, Grendel, are sins visited upon the fathers in the form of illegitimate, monstrous sons. In Kristeva’s sense, monstrous mothers endanger masculinity – the symbolic order of language, law, and civilization – by threatening to extend the chora across time and space. Sons, especially, become reflections and extensions of the mother’s power, like the spontaneously generated “children of her rage” in Cronenberg’s *The Brood*. In this film, resentments and jealousies take on the form of malformed, murderous children with no volition or identity of their own, who stalk and kill the targets of their mother’s wrath. Such is also the case with the Grendels of both *Beowulf* films, to such an extent indeed that these monstrous sons become almost automata, mindless embodiments of feminine aggressivity that have taken on flesh and terrifying power.

But these hybrid offspring take after their fathers too. The Grendel of the 1999 *Beowulf* lays waste to a land the genocidal Hrothgar had ravaged a generation before. As such, like many doppelgängers, the monster’s duplications and imitations hold a mirror up to the father, the scandal of a dark side, which figures like Jekyll’s Hyde or Dorian Gray’s portrait render visible. The dragon in the 2007 *Beowulf* is the hero’s son and double too. Their final battle, engagingly rendered by Performance Capture Technology and CGI, shows Beowulf riding the dragon, Nazgûl-like, as it lays waste to the hero’s kingdom. In this figurative sense, then, the monster simply carries out the repressed wishes of his father riding on his back. Beowulf becomes Hrothgar’s heir only after killing the king’s only son, Grendel. The trajectory of his life closely apes Hrothgar’s: Beowulf marries Wealtheow, sires a monster, and becomes death-obsessed and despairing in his old age. Both his crown and the cup advertise him as a dragon king, though he kills the dragon and himself in an elaborate imitation of the death of Grendel. Deliberately recalling the first fight with Grendel, Beowulf’s arm is tethered fast with an

enormous chain from which he hangs suspended in front of the dragon's breast. He dismembers himself, slicing through the tendons in his shoulder, in order to reach through a glowing chink in the beast's scaly armor to his heart. At the end, all fury spent, father and son lie dying side-by-side on the shore. The dragon shrinks back into human form, such that Beowulf sees a golden version of his son as he might have been. In these abundant reflections between monsters and men, the film demonstrates over and again the descent of both from a self-destructive, feminine *jouissance*.

Hrothgar and Beowulf become creatures of the monstrous feminine every bit as much as Grendel and the dragon are. Aging rapidly under the sway of this monstrous feminine infantilizes both old men. What's more, she herself is immortal and forever young. At the end of the film, Wiglaf finds the dragon cup washed ashore while the naked avatar of Angelina Jolie swims seductively before him. The scene leaves little doubt that Wiglaf will follow in Beowulf's footsteps: there is little hope of a different result. In this last wink toward horror films and their risible evasions of closure, we realize not so much the potential for a sequel as an assurance that the dynamics which breed monsters through the eroticization of fame and power are older and more enduringly potent than any god could ever be.

One of Slavoj Žižek's most provocative contentions about postmodernity concerns how contemporary subjects cope with what he calls the waning of symbolic efficiency and the apparent atrophy of the super-ego in permissive times. For Žižek, subjects remain passionately attached to their own subjection through a masochistic attachment to the increasingly onerous burdens of unfettered enjoyment – no longer prohibited but rather demanded by a super-ego. In the words of Tony Myers: "sensual gratification has been elevated to the status of an official ideology. We are compelled to enjoy sex. The compunction – the injunction 'Enjoy!' – marks the return of the super-ego."³⁶ The monstrous feminine of the 2007 *Beowulf* would seem to incarnate this newer, Lacanian understanding of *jouissance*, wherein a dogged devotion to enjoyment, an apparently irresistible impulse to enjoy to the fullest all those benefits that power and position afford, becomes a post-modern variation on Freud's death wish.

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In recent *Beowulf* scholarship there has, perhaps, been an increasing willingness to put the monsters at the center of our reactions to the poem, a trend apparent in the fine and influential work of Orchard and Cohen, for instance. In some ways parallel is the rash of recent *Beowulf*-inspired films

³⁶ Tony Myers, *Slavoj Žižek* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 53.

that have adapted the poem according to stereotypes, commonplaces, and plotting devices of the horror film. There is probably little question of direct influence, though such approaches to the poem have in common works such as John Gardner's *Grendel* and Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead* as well as the saturation of popular and academic cultures with the theories of Lacan, Žižek, and Kristeva. Already in the 1960s and 1970s, scholars such as Alain Renoir and Michael Lapidge were comparing the visceral poetics of *Beowulf* to the horror film.³⁷ What appears to have already emerged, then, is something approaching a widespread agreement about the poem's genre (horror *not* heroic or elegiac), its flawed, acquisitive men, its castrating feminine monster, and her abject son who threatens patriarchal boundaries. Here at least scholarly trends and filmic adaptations of the poem seem to be singing much the same tune. The vanishing mediator in this strange coupling of scholarship and popular culture is theoretical discourse, now every bit as influential on mass-market productions as it is in academia.³⁸

³⁷ For Renoir see: Alain Renoir, "Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*," in *The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Donald K. Fry (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1968), 154–66 (originally published in *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 63 [1962]: 154–67) and "The Terror of the Dark Waters: A Note on Virgilian and Beowulfian Techniques," in *The Learned and the Lewd: Studies in Chaucer and Medieval Literature*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 147–60. For Lapidge, see "Psychology."

³⁸ A few more representative examples might include Paul Acker's recent essay, "Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf*," *PMLA* 121.3 (2006): 702–16; Eric Wilson's scapegoating approach to the poem in "The Blood Wrought Peace: A Girardian Reading of *Beowulf*," *English Language Notes* 34 (1996): 7–30; and James W. Earl's discovery of a "hidden incest theme" in the poem, in "The Forbidden *Beowulf*: Haunted by Incest," *PMLA* 125.2 (2010): 289–305.

Words, Swords, and Truth: Competing Visions of Heroism in *Beowulf* on Screen

Mary R. Bowman

The calendar of American colleges and universities is such that many classes in early British literature were reading *Beowulf* shortly before or after 11 September 2001. To some of these instructors and students, Beowulf's advice to Hrothgar that "it is better for everyone to avenge his friend than to mourn much" (Sēlre bið æġhwām / þæt hē his frēond wrece þonne hē fela murne)¹ had a peculiar resonance as this nation both mourned and contemplated a military response. The following years have seen a remarkable outpouring of new *Beowulfs*, in print, performance, and newer media. While the reasons for this phenomenon are doubtless manifold and complex, the products of this curious renaissance can offer insight into current values and anxieties in our culture. These are large and complex issues, and though they cannot be explored fully in the space of one essay, I hope to contribute to that project by focusing on the treatments of the hero in a few of these productions.²

As scholars of medievalism are well aware, the way heroes of ancient and medieval tales are re-imagined for contemporary audiences says a great deal about our own conceptions of the heroic: what is desirable and what is possible in a hero for our time. This is true for a wide range of subjects and throughout the long history of medievalisms, Robin Hood and various characters from the Arthurian legend being perhaps the most endlessly mallea-

¹ *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John Niles, 4th ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), lines 1384b–1385.

² I would like to thank all those whose perceptive comments helped in the development of this article. These include the audience at the "Electronic Beowulf" session at the International Congress on Medieval Studies in 2008, my colleagues Dejan Kuzmanovic, Lorri Nandrea, and Sarah Pogell, and the anonymous readers for *Studies in Medievalism*.

ble.³ Neither creative nor scholarly interest in these topics shows any signs of ebbing, but in the first decade of the twenty-first century the profile of Beowulf rose notably. In addition to adaptations in other media, between 2005 and 2007 three new film versions of *Beowulf* appeared, followed by the *Beowulf*-inspired *Outlander* in 2008.⁴ In spite of their shared source, these films offer widely varying versions of the hero. In this they are consistent with their larger popular cultural context, which offers a range of heroic modes. (The same years saw installments in the franchises of Harry Potter, Jason Bourne, Batman, Superman, and Rocky Balboa, just to name a few.) But more specifically, the *Beowulf* films pointedly ask questions about the role of martial prowess in defining heroism and the necessity (or even possibility) of inquiring into the justice of the causes that prowess is called upon to serve, taking positions along a continuum that has militarism and diplomacy – swords and words – as its poles. The stances they take, and the heroes they offer, often reflect cultural divisions over the military actions taken by the US government, and the rhetoric used to justify it, following 9/11. The *Beowulf* story (which in the original poem offers a hero skilled in both combat and communication) proves to be a fertile ground for such concerns, perhaps sufficient explanation for the uptick in its popularity with filmmakers during those years.

Before turning to the films, I will first consider an older offering: the 1995 episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* entitled “Heroes and Demons.”⁵ While this example lies outside the chronological scope of the rest of this article, it marks one end of the ideological spectrum along which the other works lie, and so provides a useful framework for their analysis.⁶ In this episode, one of the crew members, Ensign Kim, vanishes while playing the role of

³ Examples of such works, and the scholarship on them, are too numerous to make even a selective list useful here. Many medieval films, including some roughly contemporaneous with the pieces I will be discussing, could be brought usefully into conversation with the *Beowulf* films. For purposes of this chapter I have opted not to make such connections, believing I can do more justice to a rigidly, if perhaps artificially, carved-out topic.

⁴ This is not counting the 2007 *Beowulf: Prince of the Geats*, written and directed by Scott Wegener, which I will not be discussing here.

⁵ “Heroes and Demons,” *Star Trek: Voyager*, Videocassette, written by Naren Shankar, directed by Les Landau (1995; Paramount, 2000).

⁶ It also merits more attention than it has so far received, although David W. Marshall’s recent article on *Outlander* has filled in the gap to some extent with a short but perceptive discussion: David W. Marshall, “Harrying an Infinite Horizon: The Ethics of Expansionism in *Outlander* (2008),” in Kevin J. Harty, ed., *The Vikings on Film: Essays on Depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011), 135–49. In the larger project of which this article is a part, I plan to consider it in its own cultural moment, alongside its *Beowulf* brethren: Graham Baker’s film and John McTiernan’s *The 13th Warrior*. That plan also accounts for the omission of McTiernan’s film here; though it resonates with some of

Beowulf in a holodeck version of the poem. (The holodeck is a part of the ship where the crew can participate in holographic recreations of personal or fictional experiences.) After two others sent to investigate also disappear, the ship's doctor, himself a hologram, is sent in.

This episode makes two radical revisions to the early medieval model of the warrior hero. First, it makes that model gender-inclusive, in that its best representative is a woman. The poem's roles of the coastguard and the door-warden are here conflated and given to Hrothgar's daughter, re-named Frea. Mailclad and referred to as a "shieldmaiden," she challenges all the newcomers as they arrive and then presents them to Hrothgar in the hall. When the doctor indicates that he knows her reputation, she enumerates her exploits with Beowulfian enthusiasm, asking which of them he has heard of. Later in the episode, she is even given one of Beowulf's famous lines, 572b–573 ("Wyrð oft nereð / unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deāh!"), here (slightly mis)translated: "It is said that fate often spares a doomed warrior if his courage can prevail."⁷ She is clearly recast in the mold of the warrior Beowulf; indeed, with Kim/Beowulf missing, she is the most Beowulf-like character for most of the episode.

In the only scholarly discussion of this revision of Freawaru into Frea that I know of, Angela Jane Weisl calls the episode's understanding of *Beowulf* "strangely flawed," and says sarcastically that "a new, rather different variant manuscript must have turned up by the twenty-fourth century, one that gave astonishing subjectivity to Freawaru."⁸ Rather than seeing this as a "flawed recollection of classical material," I suggest that this is a deliberate revision and part of a coherent commentary on and revision of *Beowulf's* model of the heroic. (The nearly exact recollection of 572b–573 should be sufficient to dispel the impression that the writer simply had a poor memory of the poem. I have had students – good ones – not recognize the line when I showed them this scene some time after they had read the poem.) The message seems clear: women can be heroic too, and in the traditional martial Germanic way. And given that no one within the episode indicates that Frea's heroic status is remarkable, the episode also implies that this gender-neutrality is perfectly natural and normal.

the issues I will raise, it is best considered in relation to its own decade and to its source text, Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead*.

⁷ If not simply a mistake, the change of *unfægne* (undoomed) to *doomed* may reflect a different conception of fate and the interaction between fate and free will from that of the poem. While an interesting issue in its own right, I do not believe this significantly affects the re-conception of heroism in the episode.

⁸ Angela Jane Weisl, *The Persistence of Medievalism: Narrative Adventures in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), 30.

The bad news for gender equity is that this episode also renders this mode of heroism ineffective and offers another model in its place, represented by the doctor. Neither Frea nor any of the other warriors has been able to defeat Grendel, and even Beowulf, when he arrives in the person of Ensign Kim, fails: vanishing, and presumed killed by Grendel.⁹ The doctor, though very different in skills (and eventually, his approach to the problem), is represented as a legitimately comparable hero. Early on, when Frea first learns his name (he has taken the name Schweitzer, after the famous Earth doctor), she replies that it is “a hero’s name”; hearing that he is looking for Grendel, she observes that “only a warrior would seek that which others flee.” After arriving at the hall, when he is asked to tell tales of his heroic exploits, he cites not a sword-fight but an incident when he prevented an epidemic. No one seems to find this odd or inadequate. When first confronted by Unferth, who in this version insists on a fight rather than a verbal exchange, the doctor is helpless with a sword and gains respect only when he puts the sword down, says “This is absurd,” and assumes (as a hologram is able to do) a state of pure energy, which allows Unferth’s sword to pass through him without harm.¹⁰ He displays a notably different skill-set, yet his seems to be accepted as equivalent, meriting a status comparable to Frea’s or Beowulf’s. Indeed, near the end of the episode, having failed in his earlier confrontations with Grendel, he prefaces his request for another chance with “You know me for a true warrior,” and here again no one disagrees.

As with the dramatic reshaping of Freawaru into Frea, there is a consistent construction of this character as legitimately heroic, but in this case, he offers a very different set of values and priorities along with his different reper-

⁹ While not much has been written by scholars about this specific episode, feminist scholarship on the series, in particular of the character of Captain Janeway, has found a similar sense of incomplete or ambivalent revision of conventional gender roles. Aviva Dove-Viebhahn argues that Janeway’s status as a “heroic female [...] ostensibly unlimited by conventional gender stereotypes” is qualified by the uniquely domestic focus of her ship: its mission, unlike those in other *Star Trek* series, is simply to return home. “Embodying Hybridity, (En)gendering Community: Captain Janeway and the Enactment of a Feminist Heterotopia on *Star Trek: Voyager*,” *Women’s Studies* 36 (2007): 597–618. Similarly, Debra Bonita Shaw has argued that Janeway’s gender-bending potential is contained, with particular attention to her sexuality. She is permitted very little sexual activity, and when she does have sex, it is rendered suspect in some way: for example, occurring when she is not in her right mind or putting the ship in jeopardy. “Sex and the Single Starship Captain: Compulsory Heterosexuality and *Star Trek: Voyager*,” *Femspec* 7.1 (2006): 66–85.

¹⁰ As Marshall has pointed out, this imperviousness to weapons (along with a later loss of his arm) creates a parallel between the doctor and Grendel, which suggests that “the actions of the Starfleet officers are implicitly called into question” (“Harrying,” 143). I would add that it also blurs the distinction between hero and adversary, self and Other, consistent with the ultimate message of the episode.

toire of skills. As a result, the doctor provides an alternative to the revenge- and violence-oriented model of heroism, instead privileging dialogue over combat. In a later scene, again challenged by Unferth, he has better success with the sword (adding a torch to his weaponry), and gains an advantage, but he pointedly chooses not to press it. Instead, he tells Unferth, "The only reason you won't die is that I have taken an oath to do no harm." This Hippocratic attitude also informs his ultimately successful approach to the problem of Grendel. Captain Janeway and the crew come to understand that the samples of "photonic activity" that they beamed aboard at the beginning of the episode are in fact sentient beings who they have unwittingly taken prisoner. The holodeck, then, and Grendel's role in the story, have been commandeered by these beings, who capture the crew members in retaliation. The doctor achieves the restoration of the missing crew members by releasing the remaining imprisoned photonic life form and making a conciliatory speech, saying, "there's no need for any more of this." In stark contrast to the original poem, in this version the depredations of Grendel are ended not by the fighting ability of a warrior, but by the healing skills of a doctor armed with the truth about the situation: words, not swords, provide the solution.¹¹ The implication is that the kind of heroism represented by the warrior Beowulf is no longer desirable, no longer effective (if it ever was), and needs to be superseded by a non-violent one: Vengeance and strength are replaced by understanding, respect, and the redress of wrongs.

Voyager thus fits squarely into a prominent late-twentieth-century heroic tradition, one that struggles to decouple heroism from a traditional conception of masculinity (with mixed success), admitting both women and forms of heroism not rooted in violence or physical strength, and that preaches a politics of intercultural respect.¹² This tradition goes back at least as far as MASH's Hawkeye Pierce, another TV doctor (whose show had much to say

¹¹ Michael Livingston and John William Sutton also discuss this episode, though even more briefly than Marshall, in "Reinventing the Hero: Gardner's *Grendel* and the Shifting Face of Beowulf in Popular Culture," *Studies in Popular Culture* 29 (2006): 1–16. They call it a "more progressive version of the Beowulf story," one that "is used by the television creators to convey a lesson about tolerance" (9–10). As they effectively demonstrate, most modern versions of the story owe a debt to John Gardner's 1971 novel *Grendel*.

¹² *The 13th Warrior* shares some of this interest in cross-cultural understanding, though it focuses that interest on the contact between the Arab emissary and the Vikings and appears to have no qualms about violence against the Wendol. For a useful discussion, including attention to the construction of masculinity in the film, see Lynn Shutter, "Vikings through the Eyes of an Arab Ethnographer: Constructions of the Other in *The 13th Warrior*," in Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh, eds, *Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 75–89.

about a controversial war); *Voyager's* contribution was to claim the Beowulf story as a fitting a vehicle for that tradition.

In this way, some groundwork was already laid for the creators of *Beowulf and Grendel*,¹³ which embraces much of the philosophy of “Heroes and Demons.” Less committed to questioning the centrality of warriorhood in the definition of heroism or the association of either with masculinity, and less sanguine about possibility of permanent peace, Sturla Gunnarsson’s 2005 film nevertheless follows *Voyager's* lead in making the *Beowulf* story one about the need to inquire into the causes of conflict, to use swords less and words more. It adds some commentary on the heroism, even humanity, of those who refuse to do so, rendering the Danes’ conflict with Grendel a kind of allegory for the controversy over the War on Terror.¹⁴

In this version, Beowulf is still recognizable as a heroic-age warrior. He is a confident, capable fighter, for example, and like his predecessor in the Old English poem he travels to Denmark out of loyalty to Hrothgar. In early scenes he is given lines that mark him as belonging to the tradition of the warrior hero, especially as it exists in the popular imagination. For example, he boasts, “I’ll see Valhalla, or that thing’s head on a pole” – not a genuine line from the poem or quite in its idiom, but clearly in the spirit of Beowulf’s “I will achieve glory for myself with Hrunting, or death will take me” (ic mē mid Hruntinge / dōm ġewryce, oþðe mec deað nimeð, lines 1490b–1491). Indeed, Beowulf’s reputation as a “hero” is established in the first scene in which he appears, washing ashore after the Breca episode; the fisherman who meets him and offers him a meal recognizes his name, and congratulates himself on having “a hero [as guest] for supper.”

While Gunnarsson’s Beowulf is cast early on in the traditional warrior mode, he must adjust his behavior as the plot unfolds. Things do not go as he expects, and courage and prowess prove to be inadequate, or inappropriate, to the task at hand, for Grendel refuses to fight him. He stays outside the hall when he realizes that strangers are inside, and even evades Beowulf’s attempts to seek him out. Beowulf is forced, somewhat unwillingly, to become a kind of private investigator, trying to find an explanation for Grendel’s behavior. What he comes to learn is that Hrothgar and the Danes killed Grendel’s father, in Grendel’s presence, when Grendel was a child, and on very slight provocation: the father had entered what the

¹³ *Beowulf and Grendel*, DVD, directed by Sturla Gunnarsson, screenplay by Andrew Rai Berzins (Anchor Bay Entertainment, 2005).

¹⁴ I am using the term *allegory* here in the sense that Tison Pugh does in “Queer Crusading, Military Masculinity, and Allegories of Vietnam in Richard Lester’s *Robin and Marian*,” in *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 114–34.

Danes consider their territory in search of food. Instead of representing a primal evil, as such beings apparently did in pre-Christian tradition, or the inheritor of an ancient divine curse, as the poem re-envisioning him through a Christian lens, this Grendel has a personal, recent, and entirely legitimate grudge against Hrothgar and his people.¹⁵ (The film strives to garner viewer sympathy for Grendel by directly presenting the murder, followed by the child-Grendel's attempt to move the body and, failing at that, his tearful beheading of the corpse and slow walk across the beach carrying his father's head, which we later see enshrined in Grendel's cave.) In the face of that reality, the boastful, violence-oriented heroism with which *Beowulf* arrives no longer seems appropriate.

Indeed, one can see this film as offering for viewers' consideration two ways of inhabiting the warrior role. In addition to *Beowulf*, there is Hrothgar. He, too, is given traits that mark him as consistent with the tradition of the Old English poem. Like any good Germanic hero, he attacks when he thinks himself wronged, and feels ashamed of his inability to protect his men and hall against Grendel's attacks. He has earned the love and respect of *Beowulf*, who describes him as "near as kin to me." But what distinguishes him from *Beowulf* is his insistence on viewing the trolls as radically Other. In addition to his treatment of Grendel's father, this is shown in his unwillingness or inability to explain Grendel's behavior (when he of all people should know what Grendel's motivation is). In response to repeated questioning from *Beowulf* about whether anything happened that might have caused Grendel's rage, he offers such theories as "hate for the mead-hall," or maybe someone "looked at him wrong," and dismisses the entire line of inquiry as tautological: "Don't ask me why a fucking troll does what a fucking troll does." In Hrothgar's mind, Grendel is simply behaving according to the inscrutable, evil nature of his kind; no other explanation for his actions is necessary or possible. Even after *Beowulf* finally gets the true story out of him, Hrothgar cannot or will not recognize any fault in himself, suggesting that his mistake was in not killing Grendel along with his father when he had the chance; "Weakness stopped my sword," he says.

This attitude – this version of the warrior hero – is presented in a negative light. While Hrothgar in his prime may have been impressive, when viewers (and *Beowulf*) see him upon *Beowulf*'s arrival, he is alternately distasteful and pathetic. He is pretty much always drunk, to the extent that he is largely

¹⁵ As Marshall aptly puts it, "The question of what makes a monster orients the entire film, as *Beowulf* [...] comes to grips with the humanity of Grendel and Hrothgar's originary monstrosity." David W. Marshall, "Getting Reel with Grendel's Mother: The Abject Maternal and Social Critique," in *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 135–59 (150).

incapacitated as a leader: he cannot manage to make the speech of welcome to Beowulf that he should (and does in the poem), and Wealhtheow has to step in: an addition that calls both his manhood and his leadership into question. He even describes himself as “a grief-crippled king half-drunk in the middle of the afternoon.” In a deleted scene available on the DVD, Wealhtheow chastises him for spitting on the floor, stating that “one troll outside is plenty,” suggesting that Hrothgar has sunk below even the standard for a human being. Viewers are clearly encouraged to see Hrothgar’s version of the medieval hero as unacceptable: ineffective and boorish to boot, just as barbaric as his enemy.¹⁶ And the film’s framing conceit (that the “true story” of the conflict between Grendel and the Danes was suppressed and replaced with the poem as we have it) suggests that the *Beowulf* poem is built on and justifies the prejudices of the Danes, deliberately reshaping the injured Grendel into a being radically and inexplicably evil. In the poem, as Lee Patterson has recently reminded us, “[d]espite the audience’s privileged knowledge of the Grendelkin’s descent from Cain and their biblical meaning, the poem still insists on their mysteriousness.”¹⁷ Gunnarsson’s film implies that the poet has adopted this belief from Hrothgar, preferring his self-justifying mystification over the truth.¹⁸

In so doing, the film also passes judgment on one prevalent kind of response to 9/11. Hrothgar’s belief that Grendel’s hostility is inherent (“what a fucking troll does”) or derives from sociopathy (“hate for the mead-hall”) parallels a similar belief about the motivations of the 9/11 hijackers articulated most famously (but not uniquely) by then-President George W. Bush: “they hate our freedoms.”¹⁹ Hrothgar’s refusal to entertain the notion that Grendel’s attacks may be explicable, if not justifiable, responses to his own actions parallels the unwillingness of much of US political discourse to engage the argument articulated most famously (if impolitically) by Ward Churchill in his essay “‘Some People Push Back’: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens.”²⁰

¹⁶ This Hrothgar is an excellent example of what Pugh calls “shattered versions of masculinity” (“Queer Crusading,” 117).

¹⁷ Lee Patterson, “The Heroic Laconic Style: Reticence and Meaning from *Beowulf* to the Edwardians,” in David Aers, ed., *Medieval Literature and Historical Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000), 133–57 (139).

¹⁸ In this way, the film participates in a well-established tradition of revisionist history in the cinema. As one reader of an earlier version of the article pointed out, “many films [...] purport to reveal the truth behind the printed legends.” While the strategy is not unique, the specific use to which it is put in this film merits analysis.

¹⁹ “Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation,” *The Washington Post*, 20 September 2001, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushddress_092001.html>.

²⁰ David P. Schultz and G. Mitchell Reyes give a useful history of Churchill’s essay and the

William J. Bennett, for example, in April 2002, explicitly denied any US responsibility: "We are a target not because of anything we have done, but because of who we are, what we stand for, what we believe, and what our nation was founded upon: the twin principles of liberty and equality."²¹ Though vastly more articulate than Hrothgar, Bennett shares in his refusal to acknowledge any responsibility, even indirect or unintentional, for the current conflict.²² From this perspective, talking about causes is useless, leaving combat or defeat as the only real options.

The figure of Beowulf in the film offers another version of the warrior hero, an alternative to the model of Hrothgar: one that adapts and employs words when swords prove inadequate. He does not reject his earlier mode entirely, but continues to be a fighter: while he comes to perceive that he, unknowingly, came to support the wrong side in this fight, he does not back out of it but follows through on his promises and his loyalty to Hrothgar, and when Grendel's mother attacks him in the lair he fights her without any sense of moral qualm. But he adds to these traditional traits of the warrior others that Hrothgar lacks: respect for his enemy and recognition of the wrongs done to him.²³ Seeing Grendel's own son in the cave, Beowulf tells him to "be proud"; later, he builds a cairn for Grendel. And he resists the white-washing of the story that his poet-companion Thorkel is already engaged in even while the story is unfolding: Hearing Thorkel telling a group

controversy around it in "Ward Churchill and the Politics of Public Memory," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 11.4 (2008): 631–58. Though Churchill's essay was written on 9/11 itself and expanded into a book by 2003, widespread attention and condemnation did not come until 2005, the same year that Gunnarsson's film was released. See also Michael J. Hyde, "The Rhetor as Hero and the Pursuit of Truth: The Case of 9/11," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8.1 (2005): 1–30. Both articles discuss several other examples of people who have tried to explore the root causes of 9/11 and acknowledge a US role in that story, and the backlash they encountered.

²¹ Quoted in Hyde, "The Rhetor as Hero," 19.

²² Marshall has anticipated my reading of Gunnarsson's film, though it is a point made in passing and not developed in his article, focused as it is on other matters. He writes, "The film might be read as criticizing Western responses to a fundamentalist Islam that the U.S. helped create by funding fundamentalist schools to counter Soviet engagements in Afghanistan, among other things" ("Getting Reel," 159, n. 41. See also 158, n. 37). While I had worked out the substance of my argument before reading his essay, I must acknowledge his precedence in print.

²³ If Hrothgar's characterization is in some degree shaped by the model of President Bush, Beowulf's gives the lie to Bush's insistence that 9/11 demands a polarized world: "Either you are with us, or you are against us" ("Text"). According to a count made by former National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Bush uttered this sentiment ninety-nine times by mid-February 2003 (Schultz and Reyes, "Ward Churchill," 637). Beowulf stays "with" Hrothgar in the sense of fighting for him, but rejects his view of the trolls.

of Danish children a fanciful version of Grendel's first visit to the Geat-inhabited hall, he stops him and insists, "Don't tell them lies."

Even this newly conscientious Beowulf does not escape entirely from moral judgment, nor does the film allow viewers to be entirely comfortable with his version of heroism. When he tries to distinguish himself from the Danes, insisting "I'm not them," his attempt at self-absolution is challenged by Selma, who replies, "No, you only killed his father," referring to her son by Grendel. He and viewers both are reminded that though he is conscientious about the justice of his actions, he is still a killer, and Grendel's son may justly harbor hatred toward him or even seek vengeance. Nevertheless, *Beowulf and Grendel* seems more interested than *Voyager* in giving viewers a warrior-hero we can like and admire, and one who can be effective. But what makes him such is his willingness to question the cause he is called upon to champion, to perceive even his enemies as human, and to recognize when they too have been wronged, and to do what he can to try to lay the feud to rest. In the long shadow of 9/11 and in the throes of war in Iraq (never wholly embraced internationally and increasingly unpopular in the US by the film's release), this film thus turns *Voyager's* generalized plea for understanding and communication into a voice of dissent.

Part of Beowulf's transformation involves his attitude toward speech. Early on, as the film is establishing his "traditional" heroic persona, he expresses disdain for verbal communication, saying that "Geats don't wield words where swords speak true." The implication is that words are untrustworthy (they *don't* "speak true") in contrast to straightforward, honest sword blows. This is a telling change from his medieval predecessor, deriving from modern cultural categories rather than the literary source. The poem's Beowulf, in fact, spends a good deal of time "wielding words," addressing Hrothgar and his representatives in the respectful manner required by social convention, running down his résumé, and, notably, using words alone to respond (successfully) to the challenge from Unferth; his speeches after returning home are even longer, and his inward reflections while approaching the dragon-fight lengthier still.²⁴ In using this line to characterize its modern Beowulf as starting out in the genuine heroic mode, *Beowulf and Grendel*

²⁴ Andy Orchard has catalogued the speeches in *Beowulf* and provides a careful analysis of their style and function in "Words and Deeds," Chapter 7 of *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2003), 203–37. "For a poem in which action is often held to play a major role," he remarks, "there is an inordinate amount of talk in *Beowulf*" (203), and Beowulf himself has the lion's share. In the first series of speeches, between Beowulf's landing on the Danish coast and his presentation to Hrothgar, "Beowulf establishes himself as fully in command of the appropriate usages, and indeed begins to demonstrate the considerable verbal dexterity that characterises his utterances in the poem" (208).

buys into a distinctly modern dichotomy between being a fighter and being a talker. This bears consideration here because it will become an important thread running through the contemporary *Beowulfs*.

In a study of the “laconic” hero, Lee Patterson has illuminated important distinctions between the laconic *style* of the Germanic hero (its preference for understatement and allusion) and both the depth of meaning that this style expresses and the capacity for effective speaking that the hero also possesses. In the response to Unferth, for example, Patterson analyzes the understated way Beowulf refers to killing the sea monsters, but also reminds us that the speech is “a demonstration of the linguistic dexterity that the true leader must possess.”²⁵ The choice of understatement does not reflect a distrust of language and preference for violence, but is a selection of the most powerfully communicative language; Beowulf’s (and *Beowulfs*) laconic style is a “strategy [...] that allow[s] for depths of meaning that a fuller, more straightforward account would misrepresent.”²⁶ The distinction between a reticence that speaks volumes to those who know how to hear it, and sheer silence, has often been lost in later eras, resulting in a prevalent model that equates both heroism and masculinity with lack of affect and paucity of speech: the strong, silent type. Patterson quotes Jane Tompkins’s description of the Western hero to highlight this change: “To be a man,” argues Tompkins, “is not only to be monolithic, silent, mysterious, impenetrable as a desert butte – it is to *be* the butte [...] relieved of consciousness itself.”²⁷ By contrast, for the medieval laconic hero “it is precisely an *excess* of consciousness – or an excess of meaning, which is much the same thing – that motivates the terse concision of these men.”²⁸ *Beowulf and Grendel* places its hero in the modern idiom at the beginning of the film – he might feel more at home in a Western than in the Old English poem – and moves him toward speech: questioning Hrothgar, trying to communicate with Grendel, and questioning Selma, the newly invented character who knows Grendel best.²⁹

One could argue, therefore, that in moving its hero from a fighter-only

²⁵ Patterson, “The Heroic Laconic Style,” 138.

²⁶ Patterson, “The Heroic Laconic Style,” 143.

²⁷ Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57, quoted in Patterson, “The Heroic Laconic Style,” 156.

²⁸ Patterson, “The Heroic Laconic Style,” 156.

²⁹ This movement from disdain for speech to a model of heroism that embraces speech was not entirely pleasing to everyone involved with the film. Director Gunnarsson reports on the commentary track of the DVD that one scene slated for cutting (a flashback of Beowulf inflicting violent death on various unnamed opponents) was kept because the marketing department objected, “it’s your only action scene”: testament to the preference for action in contemporary movie-going audiences, or at least marketers’ belief in that preference.

model to one that also values speech and strives to understand the justice of its cause, *Beowulf and Grendel* cuts through a modern, reductive, understanding of who the poem's Beowulf is and recovers something closer to the complexity of the Old English hero. After all, the poem's Hrothgar praises the departing Beowulf as much for speech and wisdom as for courage and strength, saying, "I never heard a man speak more wisely at such a young age. You are strong in might, and wise in mind, wise in speech" (ne h̥rde ic snotorlicor / on swā ġeongum feore guman þingian. / Pū eart mægenes strang, ond on mōde frōd, / wīs wordcwida! lines 1842b–1845a). As Roberta Frank shows in her comparison of the poem with skaldic poems, Beowulf stands out as more nuanced, less violent, and more inclined to peace than his counterparts. "Unlike normal Odinic warriors," she points out, "Beowulf insists on making friends of potential foes"; "[u]nlike the eddic combatants, [...] Beowulf proves that he can contain his wrath."³⁰ While there is no evidence that the filmmakers are familiar with, or are persuaded by, these and similar arguments about the poem, it is fair to say that the film's re-modeled hero is closer to his Old English predecessor than some give him credit for. (*The New York Times*'s Charles McGrath, for example, says dismissively that "the movie is, of all things, a politically correct 'Beowulf.'"³¹ Poet Anne MacKay calls Beowulf and his men "A bunch of high class thugs" who revel in "telling / how the blood spurted / like a chain-saw massacre."³² Both, perhaps, could stand to read the poem again.) Gunnarsson's Beowulf reclaims a view of heroism that values both words and swords, and an ethics that determines which tool is required in a given situation.

The issues that emerge in *Beowulf and Grendel* – of speech versus action, truth versus falsehood, and the Otherness of Grendel – remain important in other recent film versions of the *Beowulf* story, but these offer very different versions of the hero, and of his adversaries.

Occupying a position at the opposite end of the spectrum from *Star Trek: Voyager* and Gunnarsson's film is the SciFi Channel's made-for-TV version *Grendel*, first broadcast in January 2007.³³ Where the *Voyager*'s doctor and Gunnarsson's Beowulf are open to understanding Grendel and putting an end to the cycle of revenge, this Beowulf believes in an inexplicably and

³⁰ Roberta Frank, "Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*," in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 123–39 (132–33).

³¹ Charles McGrath, "Politically Aware 'Beowulfs' Miss an Ancient Delight: Terror," *The New York Times*, 4 July 2006, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/04/books/04beow.html>>.

³² Anne MacKay, "On First Looking into Heaney's Beowulf," *Prairie Schooner* 77.3 (2003): 81–82.

³³ *Grendel*, directed by Nick Lyon, screenplay by Ron Fernandez (SciFi Channel, 13 January 2007). This channel has since respelled its name *SyFy*; I have opted to use the spelling in use at the time of the film's first airing.

irredeemably evil Grendel: telling the story of his attacks on Hrothgar to a young companion, he says simply that "Grendel in his wickedness hated the laughter and the music." Hrothgar describes him in almost identical terms: "He is drawn by the sounds of goodwill and good wishes among men, things which he in his wickedness cannot possibly understand." The view of Grendel that Gunnarsson's Hrothgar holds, and his film unmasks as a self-justifying fiction, is here once again asserted as the truth. To be sure, this film does attempt to implicate Hrothgar in the horrors his people face; in the tradition of Graham Baker's 1999 *Beowulf*, there are repeated ominous hints that there is some evil at work other than the monster, and we eventually uncover the full story.³⁴ But the truth that emerges does nothing to explain the origin of the evil. We are told that, in the face of previous attacks by Grendel's mother, Scyld agreed to sacrifice the city's children in exchange for sparing the rest (like Athens sending its young people to the Minotaur) and that Hrothgar "renewed the pact" when Grendel followed in his mother's footsteps. Who she is or why she began attacking in the first place is a question left both unasked and unanswered (unlike the Minotaur, she has no back-story), and so is why Grendel has resumed the attacks now. The net effect is to pay lip-service to the idea that "evil dwells not only in the monster but in the hearts of men," while leaving the evil of the monster itself unexplained and, by implication, inexplicable.

If *Beowulf and Grendel* invites post-9/11 viewers to consider the question "why do they hate us?", and even to entertain the possibility that US foreign policy may have contributed to the hostility that drives and sustains terrorism, *Grendel* echoes the simpler view that rejects such questions as unpatriotic: the mentality that led so many to call for Ward Churchill's firing (which finally came in July 2007, though it was, officially at least, only indirectly brought about by his article), and others to vilify and boycott the country-music group The Dixie Chicks for their criticism of the president's decision to invade Iraq, to take another popularly prominent example.³⁵

Along with its uncomplicated view of Grendel, this film embraces the reductive model of the laconic hero that Gunnarsson's *Beowulf* grows out of. If the heroes in *Voyager* and *Beowulf and Grendel* have, as I have suggested, expanded on the socially skilled side of the poem's hero, this version is shaped in part by excising those aspects of the character. Where the hero of the poem is praised for verbal and mental abilities as well as for physical

³⁴ *Beowulf*, DVD, directed by Graham Baker, screenplay by Mark Leahy and David Chappé (1999; Buena Vista, 2000).

³⁵ The public statement was made in London in early 2003. A profile of the group, including discussion of "the incident," is provided by Josh Tyrangiel and Andrea Sachs, "In the Line of Fire," *Time*, 29 May 2008: 60–65.

ones, this Beowulf is a man of very few words and almost no facial expressions. He speaks less than most other Beowulfs and with a more reserved affect; he clearly believes (though he will not even go so far as to say out loud) that swords speak truer than words. In the confrontation with Unferth, for example, he says very little in response to Unferth's version of the Breca episode (observing that Unferth is drunk, and inappropriately offering him more mead, but not even mentioning that Unferth's version of the story may be inaccurate) until Unferth has reached the point of threatening Beowulf with a sword. (In a scene lasting about four minutes, Beowulf speaks a total of 112 words, over half of them within the last minute.) At this point Beowulf punches Unferth, and only then offers a very brief version of the story and a threat ("I killed the sea monsters, and I could kill you"). While on the one hand this lengthy silence (accompanied by downcast eyes and an almost sheepish expression) may show an admirable level of forbearance toward the raving drunk, it also shows an inability or unwillingness to use words to end the confrontation before it comes to blows, in notable contrast to the hero of the Old English poem. Add to this the significant change from the poem in Beowulf's use of weapons: far from deciding to fight the unarmed Grendel unarmed, this Beowulf has brought a large crossbow with an incendiary payload. Although the artistic merits of this film are few, there does seem to be a coherent vision of the main character, and that is of a man who has much more in common with Rambo than with the poem's Beowulf. Where *Voyager* and *Beowulf and Grendel* ask audiences to rethink the appropriateness of us-against-them morality and the use of violence to resolve conflict, *Grendel* reinstates that worldview and asserts a role for superior military might in enforcing it.

At the same time, this film shows some degree of ambivalence toward its warrior hero. In spite of his superior weaponry, Beowulf is a less effective hero than he is in other versions, failing to kill or even injure Grendel in his first visit to the hall. His brand of heroism, while restored to its modern clichés, is also undercut. In this way it is reminiscent of one strain in Vietnam war films, as read by Tison Pugh, those in which "a crisis of masculinity emerges in the historically accurate depiction of American defeat."³⁶ What Pugh says of these films can, to a large extent, be applied to *Grendel* and the Iraq War: "[T]he urge to depict American military heroism and machismo is counterbalanced by the history of the war itself. Consequently, tensions arise between the type of victorious masculinity celebrated in war and the historically enervated masculinity witnessed in the actual conflict."³⁷ By the

³⁶ Pugh, "Queer Crusading," 117.

³⁷ Pugh, "Queer Crusading," 118.

time this movie first aired, the Iraq War had moved from a triumphal phase of toppling Saddam Hussein to an increasingly unpopular involvement in a civil war with a mounting toll of US dead and injured.

As if to compensate for its less-than-successful main character, this film gives viewers an alternate center of narrative interest with a different type of protagonist altogether, in the character of Unferth. At first, he is an exceedingly unattractive figure. The film fleshes out the poem's dark hints of Unferth's fratricide, making him a coward to boot: In this version, Unferth is Hrothgar's younger son, who escaped from one of Grendel's attacks, leaving his brother to be killed. He speaks disrespectfully and tauntingly to Beowulf even before getting drunk (expressing disappointment in his size, for example, saying "I would have thought you'd be bigger") and when drunk launches into his tirade fueled by jealousy of the attention that Hrothgar gives to Beowulf and that a young woman named Ingrid gives to Beowulf's companion, Finn. Singularly unsympathetic in the early going, Unferth does come through in the end and has a good death, sacrificing himself to save Ingrid from Grendel's mother. We have, in effect, two heroes: the unsubtle fighter and the loser redeemed by love. While it is likely that this stems from a desire to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, it may reflect some discomfort on the filmmakers' part with the reactionary *Beowulf* they have created, or with the troubling notion that even he might not live up to expectations.

SciFi's *Grendel* thus occupies a position near the opposite end of the spectrum from that defined by *Voyager* and adopted in the post-9/11 era (not entirely without discomfort) by *Beowulf and Grendel*. Though about a year and a half come between the releases of these two films, *Grendel* functions as a response to Gunnarsson's film. Together, the two offer two deeply opposed attitudes toward the warrior hero: one, concerned with understanding the causes of conflict and using the warrior's strength only in a just cause; the other, eschewing dialogue, reveling in high-tech weaponry, and asserting unequivocally the radical evil of the enemy. Their ideas about heroism and about evil parallel the deep divide between criticism of Bush administration policies and its defenders' insistence that such criticism endangers US national security, revealing the ability of the *Beowulf* story to supply popular culture with an arena for working out competing ideas that came to the fore in this era: ideas about the nature and proper role of a warrior hero, about the nature of our enemies, and about ways to resolve conflict.

Between the ends of the ideological spectrum marked out by *Beowulf and Grendel* (and *Voyager* before it) and *Grendel* lie two additional examples. I will discuss 2008's *Outlander* only briefly, in large part because it has

been admirably analyzed by David Marshall along relevant lines.³⁸ Also, this film largely pulls away from the socio-political issues it raises and ultimately offers no coherent message. On a number of points it seems to fit in the *Voyager/Beowulf and Grendel* camp. It features its own strong, capable Freya, not as thorough-going a warrior woman as *Voyager's* Frea, but one with some fighting skills. We first see her engaged in some practice fighting with her father, and later in the film she engages in real fighting and succeeds in killing a male warrior. On the commentary track of the DVD, director Howard McCain proudly points out the atypicality of such a character in this kind of film. As Marshall demonstrates, *Outlander* also features a recurrent and clearly intentional criticism of the feud ethic and of those leaders who are focused on revenge and violence. In his words, "the moral push of the film frowns upon feud and the destruction it creates," and seeks to "promote an ideal of wise self-control."³⁹ Most significantly, *Outlander* offers a back-story to explain the motivation of the monster (here, an alien creature called a Moorwen), a similarity to other *Beowulf* films that Marshall explicitly notes.⁴⁰ The apparent sole survivor of colonialist genocide on its home planet, the Moorwen first destroys the colony in revenge and then stows away on one of the invaders' space ships, launching another attack that leaves most of the crew dead and causes the ship to crash in eighth-century Norway. A survivor of the crash, a man named Kainan, fills the position of Beowulf in this clearly *Beowulf*-inspired but not-quite-*Beowulf* story. The great personal price paid by Kainan (his wife and son are killed by the Moorwen) and the direct representation of the genocide that viewers are given as Kainan recounts events for Freya both point in the direction of a ringing critique of colonialism.

But Marshall's analysis makes clear that the film's efforts to make a hero of Kainan and move the audience to sympathize with him and root for his efforts to end the violence by killing the Moorwen work against such a critique. Kainan "acts like a magnet on [the film's] moral compass and scrambles its sense of direction," Marshall argues, and viewers are "asked to rejoice at his completion of the genocide his race initiated."⁴¹ This film shares with *Beowulf and Grendel* the difficulty of maintaining a heroic view of a man who kills a being that has been wronged (and leaves alive the perpetrator of that original wrong), but while the earlier film gave this compromising of the hero's moral status some (albeit brief) acknowledgment, here viewers seem expected not to notice or care. Essentially, *Outlander* leaves the whole

³⁸ Marshall, "Harrying."

³⁹ Marshall, "Harrying," 141.

⁴⁰ Marshall, "Harrying," 138.

⁴¹ Marshall, "Harrying," 142, 146.

question of morality and justice behind, as it devolves into a simple monster film. Not only is most of the last third of the film devoted to first luring and trapping the monster in a pit of oil that is set ablaze, then hunting the creature and its new-born offspring in their underground tunnels, but in addition the creatures themselves are rendered more monstrous as the film proceeds. Although the Moorwens appear to be herbivores when Kainan's people first attacked them (they are shown grazing peacefully), the infant Moorwen (born during the course of the film) shows an instinct for violence: it attacks Freya immediately upon detecting her in its cave. While its mother has the memory of wrongdoing to motivate its violence, the baby cannot yet have acquired that cultural knowledge; its violence is not rational or justifiable, merely bestial. Having raised hard questions about colonialism and the possibility of heroism in those who practice it, *Outlander* finds it easier in the end to revert to demonizing the other.

Also sitting in a troubling space somewhere between the poles marked by *Voyager* and *Grendel* is Robert Zemeckis's 2007 *Beowulf*, which offers perhaps the most complex understanding of the story and its hero, and ultimately the most cynical.⁴² Where those two versions of the story might be seen as offering extreme positions (diplomacy versus militarism), this film shares traits with both. On the issue of the origin of the evil enemy, it manages to have it both ways. Hrothgar and Beowulf are both made to bear considerable responsibility for the attacks their people endure, having literally engendered the attackers: Grendel is revealed to be Hrothgar's son, and the dragon Beowulf's.⁴³ But the mother of these monsters, who seduces each hero in turn with promises of glory and power (along with the physical attractiveness of Angelina Jolie), remains inscrutable: Who is she? What is her origin? What is her motivation for playing these games? Although, as Marshall has argued, the design of her lair "suggests that Grendel's mother functions rationally,"⁴⁴ neither viewers nor characters are permitted to understand the reasons for her behavior. And none of the characters even wonder — as if there were no point in attempting to understand her.

In this film, the Beowulf character's physique and approach to fighting

⁴² *Beowulf*, DVD, directed by Robert Zemeckis, screenplay by Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary (2007; Paramount, 2008).

⁴³ The idea that Hrothgar is the father of Grendel is not new, having appeared in Baker's film and having been seriously argued by Fidel Fajardo-Acosta: "I'd like to suggest that Grendel's mother is Hrothgar's sister and that Grendel is the offspring of her incestuous union with Hrothgar." *The Condemnation of Heroism in the Tragedy of Beowulf: A Study in the Characterization of the Epic*, *Studies in Epic and Romance Literature* 2 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 57. Extending the family romance to include Beowulf, however, appears to be original to Gaiman and Avary.

⁴⁴ Marshall, "Getting Reel," 145.

Grendel seem at first glance more akin to those of the SciFi channel's hero, though he borrows more from videogames than Westerns or war movies: Ray Winstone's rather soft and round torso is digitally transformed into rock-hard six-pack abs. And though he follows the lead of the poem's Beowulf in not bearing weapons to face Grendel (taking it to the bizarre extreme of not even wearing clothing) he has no compunctions about wrapping the monster's arm in a chain, wrapping the chain around pillars and tables for added leverage, and then slamming the door on the shoulder of the by now almost pitiful Grendel, who has shrunk to something like half of his original size. The overall effect is to make this Beowulf appear to be the most thug-gish, violent version yet.

One could not say of him, however, that he "won't wield words where swords speak true." It turns out that neither his words nor his sword can be trusted. He is shown to be an embellisher, if not outright fabricator, of his accomplishments from the very beginning: after he gives his version of the Breca episode, featuring nine sea monsters, Wiglaf says in an aside, "Last time there were three," and the visual representation the viewer sees of this episode is inconsistent with the narrated version Beowulf is telling the Danish audience. As he encounters the last monster, a mermaid-like creature, he says that he "killed the monster with [his] own blade, and [...] plunged it into its heart," but viewers see him dropping his sword and embracing her. His propensity to embellish, and even lie about, his deeds is established even before he meets Grendel's mother and tells the defining lie of his life. Having yielded to her temptations (begetting the dragon in the process), he claims to have killed her, and then must pile lie upon lie to make the story stand up (accounting for the loss of both Unferth's sword and Hrothgar's golden horn, and so on). The combination of his violent presentation and his dishonest speech is chilling: Zemeckis gives viewers all the moral self-confidence and physical strength of a John Wayne character, but without the integrity. As Kathleen Forni puts it, "The result is a disquieting fusion of graphic violence and moral conservatism."⁴⁵

Like *Beowulf and Grendel*, this film claims that the poem that has come down to us is a whitewash job, but where Gunnarsson's Beowulf questions Hrothgar's view of Grendel and protests the misrepresentation of his own deeds, Zemeckis's Beowulf propagates the lie himself. Only after the (entirely predictable) dragons have come home to roost does Beowulf try to tell the truth to Wiglaf – but this belated attempt to do the right thing is blocked by Wiglaf's persistent refusal to listen. Beowulf tries to broach the subject

⁴⁵ Kathleen Forni, "Popularizing High Culture: Zemeckis's *Beowulf*," *Studies in Popular Culture* 31 (2009): 45–59 (46).

before they encounter the dragon, saying, "Great friend, there is something you should know"; Wiglaf counters, "There is nothing I should know. You are Beowulf. Beowulf the mighty, the hero, the slayer, the destroyer of demons." Later, as he lies dying, Beowulf refers to "Grendel's mother, my son's mother"; Wiglaf responds, "You killed Grendel's mother when we were young. They sing of it." Beowulf then insists that it is "too late for lies," but apparently it is too late to insist that they *are* lies; the false tale has come to seem more real than the true events, and Wiglaf's denial is powerful and deep.

The message this film offers about heroism seems to be that heroes lie, tales about heroes are false, and the rest of us prefer the lies to the truth. If the *Beowulf* story has become a mirror for responses to the War on Terror, this version bespeaks an attitude of universal distrust, that neither respects the enemy as people whose motives can be understood nor believes what those in power say about their efforts to combat that enemy.⁴⁶ Even more cynically, the film suggests that no man will ever make the right choice when confronted with Angelina Jolie's digitally enhanced body. Although the film ends before viewers see whether Wiglaf will succumb in turn, his prolonged gaze and softening facial expressions suggest strongly that he may – in spite of witnessing Beowulf's entire story and knowing (as he must, in spite of powerful denial) what the consequences will be. Beowulf has attempted to do the right thing at last by facing the dragon himself, refusing to send a younger man "and let the nightmare start all over again," but it seems this may not be enough to put an end to the cycle. Our problems, the film suggests, are the product of both an evil enemy and the lack of anyone smart enough, brave enough, or honest enough to do the right thing. Most cynically of all, it suggests that it is unreasonable to expect anyone to do any better, that truth is not a valid criterion to apply to either his words or his deeds. Before leaving to fight the dragon, Beowulf asks Wealhtheow to "keep a memory of me: not as a king, or hero, but as a man, fallible and flawed." She, and the audience with her, are asked to accept Beowulf's failings (which include making false claims of military success, accepting reward and praise for those fabricated accomplishments, and literally begetting a monster) as the normal failings of an imperfect human being. The implicit claim is that no one could reasonably be held to a higher standard: both success in the fight and honest words about its outcome are too much to ask.

⁴⁶ William F. Hodapp states (though he does not develop the point) that "The film [Zemeckis] offers – with its dramatic irony and emphasis on the personal corruption of political leaders – assumes an audience steeped as much in twentieth and twenty-first century politics as anything else." "no hie fæder cunnon": But Twenty-First Century Film Makers Do," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 26 (2010): 101–8 (106).

Some reviewers praised the film for this vision. Sophie Gee, for example, regards the change in Beowulf's character, from the "scrupulously honest" hero of the Old English poem, as "ingenious, since it suggests the story is a deliberate invention [...]. This version of Beowulf doesn't give a good name to either poetry or civilization, though it reminds us that willful acts of self-creation lie at the root of both."⁴⁷ All heroes, whether warriors or diplomats or something in between, are ultimately reduced to words, the stories told of them. But emphasizing this point – at once an article of postmodern faith and an echo of the Germanic hero's hope to achieve immortality through fame – can distract from the ethical significance of the choices we make of what stories to tell and how to tell them. The recent crop of cinematic *Beowulfs* tell very different versions of the story, proffering a range of ideas: that we should prefer mutual understanding to war; that warriors should seek the truth about what they are fighting for; that lies are all we have or ever did; and that sufficiently superior weaponry renders all such questioning moot. Given the state of world affairs, which ideas we choose to accept may have implications far beyond the box office.

⁴⁷ Sophie Gee, "Great Adaptations," *New York Times*, 13 January 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/books/review/Gee-t.html?_r=1&coref=slogin&ref=books&page_wanted=all>.

Socialism and Translation: The Folks of William Morris's *Beowulf*

Michael R. Kightley

William Morris's doctor is famously said to have declared that Morris died of "simply being William Morris, and having done more work than most ten men."¹ In literary circles he is perhaps best remembered for his utopian text, *News from Nowhere*; thanks to his vital role in the emerging Arts and Crafts Movement, he is still remembered even now in interior-decorating circles for his remarkable range of product designs, most particularly wallpaper. His life was filled with an assorted array of enthusiasms and enterprises, but by the 1880s and 1890s, the last decades of his life, his focus had finally settled upon two consistent and enduring passions: first, the culture and literature of the so-called Old North and, second, the socialist movement. It is the relationship between these two passions that this chapter will examine.

The first passion actually went as far back as the 1860s and in the early 1870s included two trips to Iceland, a land he called a "terrific and melancholy beauty [...] illumined by a history worthy of its strangeness."² He preserved his memories of the land in travel journals as well as in verse,³ but the greatest legacies of Morris's Old Northernism are probably the romances

¹ Fiona MacCarthy, *William Morris: A Life for Our Time* (London: Faber, 1994), vii.

² William Morris, "The Early Literature of the North – Iceland," in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, ed. Eugene LeMire (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), 179–98 (179).

³ William Morris, *Journals of Travel in Iceland 1871, 1873*, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London: Longmans, 1911). The most notable of his Icelandic poems are "Iceland First Seen" and "Gunnar's Howe above the House at Lithend," in *Poems by the Way*, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 125–26 and 179; originally published in 1891. For the best reading of "Gunnar's Howe," see Andrew Wawn, "William Morris and Translations of Iceland," in *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics*, ed. Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 253–76. See

he set in reimagined proto-Germanic settings, such as *The House of the Wolfings* (1889) and *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890),⁴ as well as his collaborative translations of numerous Old Icelandic sagas and of *Beowulf*.⁵ The origins of Morris's passion for the socialist cause are less clear, but in 1883 he openly adopted the movement and eventually became one of its most active and visible English proponents. He was the treasurer of the Democratic Federation and in 1884 published *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism* with Henry Hyndman, founder of that body.⁶ After becoming disillusioned with Hyndman's leadership, he and others, including Eleanor Marx, broke off to create the Socialist League late in 1884. He traveled the country lecturing and protesting; his protests even got him arrested (he was fined one shilling plus costs).⁷ His greatest contribution, however, was the application of his writing skills to the cause: he wrote almost 500 articles for the socialist newspapers *Justice* and *Commonweal*,⁸ as well as the book-length *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (1893) in collaboration with the Marxist theorist E. Belfort Bax.⁹

Much critical attention has been paid to both Morris's socialism and his romances of the Old North. Moreover, much of this attention has demonstrated how inextricable these two passions were, illustrating how Morris constructs in his political writings an image of the Germanic tribes as embodying a proto-socialist communal spirit, and how his romances

also Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 250–57.

⁴ William Morris, *A Tale of the House of the Wolfings and All the Kindreds of the Mark*, in vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 1–208; William Morris, *The Roots of the Mountains wherein Is Told Somewhat of the Lives of the Men of Burgdale, Their Friends, Their Neighbours, Their Foemen and Their Fellows in Arms*, vol. 15 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*.

⁵ William Morris and A. J. Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf Sometime King of the Folk of the Weder Geats*, in vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 175–284; originally published in 1895. Morris's saga translations were published in collaboration with the Icelander Eiríkur Magnússon; the following are just two of many possible examples. *Grettis Saga: The Story of Grettir the Strong*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*; originally published in 1869. *Völsunga saga: The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, with Certain Songs from the Elder Edda*, in vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 283–490; originally published in 1870.

⁶ William Morris and Henry Hyndman, *A Summary of the Principles of Socialism: Written for the Democratic Federation* (London: Kegan Paul, 1884).

⁷ MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 536–68.

⁸ MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 486.

⁹ William Morris and E. Belfort Bax, *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (Chicago: Kerr, 1912); originally published in 1893, though the text was previously published serially in 1886–88 in *Commonweal* under the title *Socialism from the Root Up*. Subsequent page references will be cited in parentheses and refer to the 1912 edition.

imaginatively recreate this communalism to support his socialist agenda. Most recently, for example, Anna Vaninskaya has shown how the romances perform “the triumph of social duty over individual interests” and “personal self-realisation in the community,” among other elements of Morris’s socialist ideals.¹⁰ Often ignored in studies of Morris’s politics, however, are his translations. The translations themselves have received some attention (though not yet enough), but their relationship with his politics has generally gone unexamined.¹¹ That is not to say it has gone unacknowledged – quite the contrary – but it is usually more assumed than it is understood. This critical absence is regrettable. After all, both Morris’s politics and his romances are several steps removed from the medieval cultures they claim to draw upon and reflect. The translations, on the other hand, while also removed from the medieval, are nonetheless far less so. In fact, they are the very tangible products of Morris’s most direct interactions with the Old North and, as such, are remarkably valuable data for better understanding the intersection between Morris’s particular brand of late-nineteenth-century socialism and his representations of the medieval North.

Lawrence Venuti has argued, in reference to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities,” that “[t]ranslations have undoubtedly formed such communities by importing foreign ideas,” in part since “[t]o translate is to invent for the foreign text new readerships who are aware that their interest in the translation is shared by other readers, foreign and domestic.”¹² Morris would have agreed. Key to Morris’s understanding of socialism was a belief in the racial, linguistic, and cultural unity of the Northern world; the very act of translating a saga, for example, created in his readers’ minds an imagined, though not imaginary, bond with all of the other audiences of the saga, not only foreign or domestic but also medieval or modern. From Venuti’s perspective, any act of translation is political, but for Morris, whose politics and medievalism were closely intertwined, the translation of medieval texts was particularly politically charged. As we shall see, both Morris’s translation

¹⁰ Anna Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community: Romance, History and Propaganda, 1880–1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 85.

¹¹ Susan Bassnett, “Engendering Anew: Translation and Cultural Politics,” *The Knowledges of the Translator: From Literary Interpretation to Machine Classification*, ed. Malcolm Coulthard and Patricia Anne Odber de Baubeta (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1996), 53–66, does discuss the gender politics of Morris’s translations, but does not address his socialism.

¹² Lawrence Venuti, “Translation, Community, Utopia,” in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000), 468–88 (485). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6, argues that communities can be “imagined” because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

style and his specific translation choices engage his socialist view of history. With this in mind, the first aim of this article is to demonstrate the need to reintroduce close examination of Morris's medieval translations into the critical discussions around his politics.

Analyzing his translations in general would be a monumental project; for the purposes of this article, therefore, I have chosen to focus on one translation only, specifically Morris's *The Tale of Beowulf Sometime King of the Folk of the Weder Geats*, translated in collaboration with the Cambridge Anglo-Saxonist, A. J. Wyatt. I chose this text for two reasons: first, its publication date of 1895 places it at the culmination of Morris's socialist period, merely two years after the publication of his and Bax's *Socialism*. Second, it is one of if not the least appreciated of all of his translations. For example, Fiona MacCarthy felt that it deserved no more than half a page of her 700-page biography of Morris. In her words "[f]ew people have had a good word to say for Morris's *Beowulf* (least of all in Oxford). I will not attempt one. It is Morris at his most garrulous and loose."¹³ Even more devastating is J. N. Swannell's quick dismissal of the translation as "almost unreadable,"¹⁴ which is itself a softening of Chauncey Tinker's view, which deems it straight up "unreadable."¹⁵ However, there actually have been a (very) small number of critics willing to defend the translation.¹⁶ Perhaps its strongest advocate is Robert Boenig, who calls it "lively," "accurate," and "[f]or all its faults [...] the best translation available."¹⁷ But MacCarthy's pronouncement nonetheless remains true: few have had a good word, and indeed few have had any words, to say about the text. The second aim of this article, therefore, is to reintroduce this translation in particular into the critical conversation about Morris. "Garrulous" the poem may be, but its aesthetic value should not determine the amount of critical attention it receives, especially given the

¹³ MacCarthy, *William Morris*, 649.

¹⁴ J. N. Swannell, "William Morris as an Interpreter of Old Norse," *Saga-Book* 15.4 (1961): 365–82 (373).

¹⁵ Chauncey B. Tinker, *The Translations of Beowulf: A Critical Bibliography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1903), 108.

¹⁶ For a full discussion of the reception history of the translation, including positive responses, see Chris Jones, "The Reception of William Morris's *Beowulf*," *Writing on the Image: Reading William Morris*, ed. David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 197–208.

¹⁷ Robert Boenig, "The Importance of Morris's *Beowulf*," *Journal of the William Morris Society* 12.2 (1997): 7–13 (12). Interestingly, Tinker, *The Translations of Beowulf*, 109, despite his criticisms does admit that the translation has "a fairly pleasing use of the so-called imitative measure." See also P. M. Tilling's "William Morris's Translation of *Beowulf*: Studies in His Vocabulary," in *Studies in England Language and Literature in Honour of Paul Christophersen*, ed. P. M. Tilling (Belfast: New University of Ulster Press, 1981), 163–75, which argues for the value of studying at least its translation technique, if not also its literary merits.

fact that it is Morris's only translation from Old English. It may sound glib, but if we can demonstrate the value of even Morris's *Beowulf* to the discussion of his socialism, then the value of his more esteemed translations will be all the more clear. I will begin with an overview of Morris's theories of the socialist Old North, before moving on to a discussion of the context of Morris's translation, and then on to sample analyses of the text itself.

Thicker than Blood: Germanic Communalism

In a September 1883 letter to fellow socialist Andreas Scheu, Morris asserts a direct connection between his travels in Iceland and the socialism of his later life: "I learned one lesson there, thoroughly I hope, that the most grinding poverty is a trifling evil compared with the inequality of classes."¹⁸ Andrew Wawn, however, states that "though Morris's socialism is not in doubt, its putative Icelandic origin seems less certain," arguing that the *Journals* offer little evidence of Morris's exposure to the lower classes in Iceland and that "self-authenticating political testimonies built on such brittle memories and undernourished understandings ought perhaps to be taken with a pinch of Icelandic nose tobacco."¹⁹ This is a valid objection since Iceland's social and class politics are far more complex than Morris's occasionally naïve depictions indicate, but I would suggest that this objection should go only to counter the factuality or merits of Morris's political claims, not the sincerity of his belief in them or in their origins. His perceptions of Iceland may indeed have been skewed by a lack of exposure to the lower classes and by ten years of fading memory, but the influence of his image of Iceland, whether accurate or skewed, should not be underestimated.

Wherever and whenever the origins of his socialism, Morris's theories came to develop primarily through contact with other prominent thinkers, most notably Bax. Bax, born in Warwickshire, had been exposed to Marxist thought while working in Berlin in the 1880s for the *London Standard*, publishing regularly on matters philosophical and socialist.²⁰ Bax and Morris came to hold similar views about the nature of social history. Their *Socialism* presents society as moving through distinct phases, which can be loosely described as follows: (1) primitive, (2) classical/ancient, (3) medieval (early/barbaric and late), (4) modern/civilized, and eventually, (5) socialist. The relationship between these eras is not strictly linear but rather periodical, the

¹⁸ William Morris, *The Collected Letters of William Morris*, ed. Norman Kelvin, 4 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984–96), 2: 229.

¹⁹ Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians*, 276–77.

²⁰ Stanley Pierson, "Bax, Ernest Belfort (1854–1926)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

primitive being aligned with the medieval and the socialist, while the classical is aligned with the modern. In and of itself, this is not unusual; Morris and Bax themselves refer to the common view of history that privileges the ancient and the modern over the medieval: “[a]ncient civilization used to be considered as the direct parent of modern society, with nothing between them but a chaos of merely negative lapse of time” (43). Not surprisingly, *Socialism* takes to task this view of the Middle Ages as an unfortunate lacuna by inverting the traditional model and giving the primitive, medieval, and socialist eras pride of place.²¹

Morris and Bax’s orientation within these various approaches to social history puts the heaviest weight on the relationship between individuality and communality.²² Morris and Bax assert that individuality is characteristic of civilization (whether ancient or modern), while communality is characteristic of primitive society:

Modern civilized society has been developed by the antagonism between individual and social interests, between the holding of property in severalty and in common; and between the simple and limited kinship group, and the complex and extended political whole, or impersonal state, which has transformed primitive society into civilization.

The difference between these opposing circumstances of society is, in fact, that between an organism and a mechanism. The earlier condition in which everything, art, science (so far as it went), law, industry, were personal, and aspects of a living body, is opposed to the civilized condition in which all those elements have become mechanical,

²¹ This general perspective is, of course, not unique to Morris and Bax; Rosemary Jann, “Democratic Myths in Victorian Medievalism,” *Browning Institute Studies* 8 (1980): 129–49, esp. 141–49, and Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community*, esp. chaps 2 and 3, have each demonstrated the engagement in the socialist strain of medievalism of a variety of writers, from historians to revolutionaries.

²² Morris’s interest in the relationship between the individual and the community can be seen in his works of medievalism even from the period before he officially adopted socialism. It is a theme in his *Icelandic Journals*, for example, as well as in his verse adaptation of *Völsunga saga*, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs*, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of William Morris*; originally published in 1876. In this latter text, Signy rationalizes her decision to commit incest in order to breed a son powerful enough to avenge her father and brothers by convincing herself that she is doing it “for the world’s sake” (27). This tension between personal desire and communal good culminates in her exclamation that:

Alone I will bear it; alone I will take the crime;
On me alone be the shaming, and the cry of the coming time.
Yea, and he for the life is fated and the help of many a folk,
And I for the death and the rest, and deliverance from the yoke. (27–28)

uniting to build up mechanical life, and themselves the product of machines material and moral. (22–23)

The prose may be somewhat convoluted, but the message is nonetheless clear. Morris and Bax see the essence of civilization not in technological, governmental, or industrial advancement, since, as they emphasize in the second paragraph, these things existed to some extent even in primitive society. On the contrary, they locate the essential difference between civilization and primitivism in the nature of social relationships. Morris and Bax are not arguing that civilization privileges exclusively individual values while primitive society privileges exclusively the communal; rather they are arguing that civilization creates an “antagonism” between the needs of the individual and those of the rest of society, while primitive society generates a harmonic sympathy between those needs.

Importantly, this minimizing of the significance of technological (etc.) advancement is at the heart of the periodical nature of Morris and Bax's theory of social development: civilization is not a Pandora's box, contents unleashed, but merely a low point in an ongoing cycle. Primitive society in its pre-classical form will not return, due to technological and industrial advancement, but the communal spirit of that primitivism can return and, indeed, has done so in the past. Much like “[a]ncient civilization used to be considered as the direct parent of modern society,” Morris and Bax present early primitive society as the parent, in spirit if not in particulars, of early medieval, barbaric society: they identify a “close resemblance on many points between the pre-classical period of antiquity, the epoch of the Homeric poems, and the Middle Ages” (43). The overall movement of social history, therefore, could be visualized as a wave function, oscillating repeatedly between the dissociation of individual from societal needs on the one hand, and the harmonizing of those needs on the other.²³ Vaninskaya has pointed to another useful metaphor, that of a spiral, which rightly empha-

²³ The image of a wave function addresses a key aspect of Morris and Bax's theory, specifically the idea that the impulses towards the communal and those towards the individual both exist in all eras, even when one is in ascendance. History, for them, flows in a continuous curve from one side of the divide to the other, with identifiable inflection points when one impulse begins to override its opposite. See, for example, their description of the transition between the late classical and early medieval periods:

This interpenetration of progressive barbarism and decaying Roman civilization, so essential to the life of the new epoch, began with the first invasion of Italy by the Goths (406), and went on through centuries of confused war and struggle, till the process of welding together the varying elements grew complete about the time of Charles the Great. (50)

sizes that the periodical nature of history does not preclude progress:²⁴ she indicates that Bax was influenced by the work of the social theorist Lewis H. Morgan, who suggested that “the next higher plane of society [...] will be a revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes.”²⁵

Morris and Bax explain this oscillation between medieval communalism and modern individualism, in part by examining the difference between communities tied together by bonds of blood and those tied together by bonds of affection:

Our present family of blood relationship, based on assumed absolute monogamy, recognizes feeble responsibility outside itself, and professes to regulate the degrees of affection to be felt between different persons according to the amount of kinship between them, so that, for instance, the brotherhood of blood would almost extinguish the sense of duty in that other brotherhood of inclination or of mutual tastes and pursuits, and in fact scarce admit that such ties could be real. (9–10)

This argument goes on to place a hefty portion of blame for the ills of capitalism on this over-emphasis in modern society on the close ties of blood. Morris and Bax here assert that blood kinship has been the means by which modern civilization can quantify “the degrees of affection” – and, more importantly, the means by which the modern individual can morally justify the disaffection he or she feels for those outside those blood-sanctioned borders. Genuine community, in this view, has been shrunk to its smallest viable unit (other than the single individual), eliminating any broader notions of “brotherhood.” Moreover, they argue that the brotherhood even of familial bonds is often likewise meaningless, since affection cannot and should not be forced; such blood ties generally become, in their words, “the iron chain of conventional sham duty” (11). It is absurd, in Morris and Bax’s view, to extricate free will from affection: regulated affection simply serves to reduce it to the level of “mechanism,” to return to the dichotomy mentioned above. On the other hand, allowing “inclination” and freely chosen affection, rather than consanguinity, to be the foundation of social bonds leads to a much-to-be-desired “organic” community.

In Morris and Bax’s theory, this organicity goes hand in hand with the pre-classical tribes, as well as with the early medieval Germanic tribes that followed the classical era. Interestingly, at first glance their organic model

²⁴ Vaninskaya, *William Morris and the Idea of Community*, 84–85.

²⁵ Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York: Henry Holt, 1878), 552.

does not seem all that different from the model described above, since it, too, seems to identify blood relations as the core communal identity marker:

This primitive community took the form of a narrow and exclusive group based on the kinship, real or supposed, of its members. The three integral bodies of this society are the Gens, the Tribe, and the People. The Gens is a group founded on actual blood relationship, in which inter-marriage is forbidden [...].

These Gentes have a tendency to coalesce and form the Tribe, in which kinship is still supposed, but is not necessarily actual; as time goes on, the Gentes tend to lose their autonomous existence in the Tribe; but the Tribe in its turn tends to merge itself into a higher unity, the People, which is a federation of tribes, and in which the formal traditional kinship is in general merely mythical. (25–26)

The “narrow and exclusive group” of the opening sentence is certainly reminiscent of the modern community, but the similarity is illusory. The modern, civilized race for Morris and Bax is indeed also composed of “narrow and exclusive groups,” but these modern groups actively resist, almost repel, each other, forming a collective only in the sense of a mass of individual units. The internal momentum of the primitive community, and its eventual successor in the Germanic tribes, is precisely the opposite: instead of resisting integration, these groups tend naturally, even inevitably, towards amalgamation. This amalgamation leads to broader communal identities, and, furthermore, to the non-blood “brotherhoods” that Morris and Bax suggested are so lacking in civilized communities. Moreover, part of this amalgamation is an acknowledgment that while kinship is vitally important on a symbolic level, its practical connection to blood is far from absolute. Even at the basic level of the Gens, Morris and Bax insert a qualifier, “real or supposed,” into their description of the kinship within the group. As the unification of the Gentes progresses, the balance swings further and further away from the “real” side of the equation, first with “supposed, but not necessarily actual” at the tribal level, and finally with “in general merely mythical” at the level of the People. The importance of this notion of “supposed” or “mythical” kinship cannot be underestimated. “Mythical,” of course, means far more than simply unreal, if it even means that. Morris and Bax suggest that even as the members of the People acknowledge less and less factual consanguinity with each other, they still maintain the pretence of kinship; this kinship, freed from the restrictions of blood, achieves a highly symbolic, perhaps even quasi-sacred, significance. Morris’s desire for such communities that amalgamate organically through the bonds of a freely chosen brotherhood of affection, and his belief that the Germanic tribes had come

closest throughout our social history to achieving that desire, is central to understanding many of Morris's translation choices.

The Folks of Beowulf

It is not hard to see why the original *Beowulf* would make Morris's version of *The Pall Mall Gazette's* "Best Hundred Books by the Best Judges" in 1886. As well as being a key text for any study of the Old North (including its participation, however brief, in his beloved Volsung legend), *Beowulf* provides any number of moments that would have resonated with Morris's belief in fellowship through love as a cardinal value, and the need for organic amalgamation of communities. The question of Hrothgar's possible adoption of Beowulf; the exploration of the relationship between a leader and his community; the intimacy of the Wiglaf–Beowulf relationship; the aiding of one Germanic racial grouping, the Danes, by another, the Geats – these are just a few aspects of the text that would have appealed to Morris's notion of a Germanic free community. But this appeal was not only plot-based or even thematic; it was also linguistic. Old English was, for Morris, tangible evidence of England's community with the greater Northern world. Morris was not alone in this belief, but his unique translation choices, infused as they are with his socialist thought, provide a significant commentary on his ideas of the nature of the Germanic races.

As was his *modus operandi* (and not just for his translations), Morris collaborated with an individual of greater expertise in the field. For *The Tale of Beowulf*, this was A. J. Wyatt of Christ's College, Cambridge. Wyatt was a productive scholar of Old English; looking, for example, at the few years on either side of the publication of their translation, Wyatt produced an edition of *Beowulf* in 1894 and later *An Elementary Old English Grammar* (1897).²⁶ The common assumption is that Wyatt (and similarly Eiríkur Magnússon for the saga translations) provided the technical know-how, while Morris added the artistry. The reality was probably more complex than this, though that debate is not particularly important to the question at hand; for our purposes it is sufficient to say that Morris's extensive role in the final crafting of the translation means his ideology is particularly well represented in the final product.²⁷ In terms of production context, more important to our purposes is that while many of Morris and Eiríkur's translations of the sagas

²⁶ A. J. Wyatt, ed. *Beowulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894); A. J. Wyatt, *An Elementary Old English Grammar (Early West Saxon)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897).

²⁷ The critical tendency to allocate neatly the scholarly side of the translation process to Eiríkur or Wyatt and the poetic side to Morris, is buttressed by Morris's own accounts.

were the first English renderings, Morris and Wyatt translated *Beowulf* into an already healthy tradition of translations. This offers an opportunity for critical insight: Morris, and certainly Wyatt, would have been aware of – and therefore influenced by – at least some of these translations, so comparison of their translation choices with those that preceded them offers an insight into what made their understandings of the poem particular. Even if one ignores the translations into other languages, including Latin, German, and Danish, by the time of Morris and Wyatt's 1895 version, the poem had been translated into English in its entirety eight times, beginning with John M. Kemble's influential 1837 version,²⁸ and in part over twenty times.²⁹ The various versions include both prose and verse translations, translations from either side of the Atlantic, and even a version targeted primarily at children. Importantly, this translation tradition was particularly strong in the years leading up to Morris and Wyatt's version, with five full English translations in the two decades before Morris and Wyatt published their own. They were not, therefore, translating in isolation, and so any analysis of their work should take into account the ever-richer tradition to which they were contributing.

The opening lines of *Beowulf* famously recount the origin of the Scylding line and the establishment of the dominion of the Gar-Danes over their

In an 1879 letter to *The Athenaeum*, for example, he plays down his own contributions to the saga translations:

my share in the translation was necessarily confined to helping in the search for the fittest English equivalents to the Icelandic words and phrases, to turning the translations of the "visur" into some sort of English verse, and to general revision in what might be called matters of taste; the rest of the work, including notes, and all critical remarks, was entirely due to Mr. Magnússon's learning and industry. (Morris, *Collected Letters*, 1:513)

On the other hand, Gary Aho, in his Introduction to Morris's *Three Northern Love Stories* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), v–xxxvii, resists the critical tendency, arguing convincingly that Eiríkur was far more than merely the "learning and industry" (xxx). Aho is certainly correct, but the inverse is probably also true: Morris was likewise involved in more than merely the "matters of taste." For example, Swannell, in "William Morris as an Interpreter of Old Norse," analyzes a working manuscript of Morris and Eiríkur's translation of *St. Olaf's Saga* that survives in the Brotherton Library in Leeds. This analysis demonstrates that Morris directly engaged the source Old Icelandic text while composing the translation. It is likely that the collaborative process between Morris and Wyatt was similar, though the evidence is sparse.

²⁸ John M. Kemble, trans., *A Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Poem of Beowulf* (London: Pickering, 1837).

²⁹ The best bibliography of *Beowulf* translations is Chauncey B. Tinker's *The Translations of Beowulf*, as updated by Marijane Osborne (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1974). Osborne also maintains an up-to-date *Annotated List of Beowulf Translations* at <<http://www.acmrs.org/academic-programs/online-resources/beowulf-list>>.

ymb-sittendra (“around-sitters” or “neighboring peoples”) (9).³⁰ The combination of this nationalistic concern with the fact that Scyld begins life *feasceaft* (“destitute”) (7) but eventually becomes a *god cyning* (“good king”) (11) creates for the poem an intense focus on the nature of proper community-building. I quote here lines 1–11:

Hwæt! we Gar-Dena in gear-dagum
 þeod-cyninga þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
 Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
 monegum mægþum, meodu-setla ofteah.
 Egsode eorl,³¹ syððan ærest wearð
 fea-sceaft funden; he þæs frofre gebad,
 weox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þah,
 oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb-sittendra
 ofer hron-rade hyran scolde,
 gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning!

(“Listen! We have heard of the glory of the people-kings of the Spear-Danes in the days of old, how the princes performed deeds of courage. Scyld Scefing often took away the mead-benches from the hosts of ravagers, from many kinship groups; the nobleman caused terror, after first being found destitute. He experienced comfort for that, waxed great under the heavens, prospered in honors, until each of the neighboring peoples over the whale-road had to heed him, pay him tribute: that was a good king!”)

Morris and Wyatt translate these lines as follows:

What! we of the Spear-Danes of yore days, so was it
 That we learn'd of the fair fame of kings of the folks
 And the Athelings a-faring in framing of valour.
 Oft then Scyld the Sheaf-son from the hosts of the scathers,

³⁰ All quotations from *Beowulf* are from Wyatt's 1894 edition (minus the macros), since it provides the most accurate picture of Morris's exposure to the text; subsequent line references for the original text will be cited in parentheses. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Anglo-Saxon are my own.

³¹ It has since become standard to emend *egsode eorl* to *egsode eorlas*, making *eorlas* an accusative plural of *egsode*, with Scyld as its implied subject (“[he] terrified noblemen”). I have, however, translated the passage according to Wyatt's edition.

From kindreds a many the mead-settles tore;
 It was then the earl fear'd them, sithence was he first
 Found bare and all-lacking; so solace he bided,
 Wax'd under the welkin in worship to thrive,
 Until it was so that the round-about sitters
 All over the whale-road must hearken his will
 And yield him the tribute. A good king was that!³²

Examining the translation record shows how difficult some of the translation choices are even in the first three lines of the poem. Ignoring the hotly contested opening exclamation, two words in particular give the translators headaches: *peod-cyninga* ("people-kings") and *æbelingas* ("nobles" or even "royals"). Sharon Turner, despite a solid handful of modern terms, decided that none of them is sufficiently representative of the original Anglo-Saxon meaning and so left them effectively untranslated, offering "Theod-kings" and "ethelings."³³ Perhaps aware of the evasive nature of these translation choices, Turner provides a footnote for the former term, guiding the reader to look to the portion of his *History* that explores the nature of such kingship. Turner's decision is justifiable within such a larger academic study, but the influence of his choice is much wider in reach: he validates what will become a long tradition of such archaistic translations of Anglo-Saxon. John Josias Conybeare, A. Diedrich Wackerbarth, and John Earle all follow suit in terms of "æthelings/ethelings," while Wackerbarth also borrows "Theod-Kings."³⁴ Turner's influence was obviously due in part to his primacy within the field and his general popularity. Likewise, Kemble's strong credentials and Benjamin Thorpe's popularity served to validate the modernizing strain of translation; Kemble opts for "mighty kings" and "noble men,"³⁵ while Thorpe selects "great kings" and "princes."³⁶ They are followed, for example, by Thomas Arnold, H. W. Lumsden, and James M. Garnett.³⁷

³² Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 179.

³³ Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 4th ed., vol. 3 (London: Longman, 1823), 282.

³⁴ John Josias Conybeare, trans., *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Harding, 1826), 35; A. Diedrich Wackerbarth, trans., *Beowulf: An Epic Poem Translated from the Anglo-Saxon into English Verse* (London: Pickering, 1849), 1; John Earle, trans., *The Deeds of Beowulf: An English Epic of the Eighth Century Done into Modern Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), 1.

³⁵ Kemble, trans., *A Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Poem of Beowulf*, 1.

³⁶ Benjamin Thorpe, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf, the Scôp or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg*, 3rd ed. (London: Reeves, 1889), 3–5; first edition published in 1865.

³⁷ Thomas Arnold, ed. and trans., *Beowulf: A Heroic Poem of the Eighth Century* (London:

There was much at stake in even these initial translation choices. On top of the issue of archaizing versus modernizing strategies (and the resultant orientation between Anglo-Saxon production community and modern English reception community), there is the selection of Germanic versus Latinate words,³⁸ which makes assertions about the relationship between Anglo-Saxon England and its contemporary cultures and political bodies: was it a part of a broader Germanic and/or Scandinavian – possibly pagan – world or was it closer in alignment to the clearly Christian southern Europe? These are just the two most obvious issues, but they are important: establishment of these traditional translations, even of single words, generates an expectation that they be translated in such a way in the future. It is in deviation from this expectation that other translators, including Morris and Wyatt, were able to create often highly political meaning.

Among the most political of these openings is that of Earle. “What ho!” he writes, “we have heard tell of the grandeur of the imperial kings of the spear-bearing Danes in former days, how those ethelings promoted bravery.”³⁹ For Earle, Scyld’s domination of his neighbors can apparently be translated into a nineteenth-century context most clearly by the notion of imperialism. Earle, therefore, lends credibility to the imperialist enterprise by suggesting it has an ancient pedigree, reaching back into England’s Anglo-Saxon heritage. Earle’s choice not to translate “etheling” reinforces this notion by evoking images of a princely Germanic lineage. Scyld, and by extension Hrothgar and Beowulf, were not simply barbarian thugs, but rather the imperial precursors of the modern ethelings, such as Victoria herself. Morris and Wyatt’s opening lines contrast with Earle’s quite markedly, which gains particular significance given Morris’s version followed closely on the heels of Earle’s. Most notably, while Morris and Wyatt also keep “Athelings” essentially untranslated, they offer “kings of the folks” for *þeod-cýninga*.⁴⁰ The selection of the word “folk” is partially because of its Anglo-Saxon etymology, but primarily because it evokes a sense of earthiness, a connection with all strata of the community. With the possible exception of Lesslie Hall’s similar “folk-kings,”⁴¹ then, Morris and Wyatt emphasize more than any prior translator that the king is not over the people but of the people. While only implicitly

Longmans, 1876), 1. H. W. Lumsden, trans., *Beowulf: An Old English Poem Translated into Modern Rhymes* (London: Kegan Paul, 1881), 3. James M. Garnett, trans., *Beowulf: An Anglo-Saxon Poem, and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Ginn, 1892), 2–3; first edition published in 1882.

³⁸ See Tilling, “Morris’s Translation of *Beowulf*,” for a detailed discussion of Morris and Wyatt’s use of archaic versus modern and of Germanic versus Latinate vocabularies.

³⁹ Earle, trans., *The Deeds of Beowulf*, 1.

⁴⁰ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 179.

⁴¹ Lesslie Hall, trans., *Beowulf, An Anglo-Saxon Epic Poem* (Boston: Heath, 1892), 1.

socialist, following closely after the explicit imperialism of Earle's opening lines, Morris and Wyatt's message is clear.

Morris's use of the word "folk" not only to translate *ƿeod* but also in the translation's extended title (*Sometime King of the Folk of the Weder Geats*) is part of a larger pattern in his Germanic writings of his later years. Reading his *Beowulf* and the late romances leaves one with the sense that "folk" might just have been Morris's favorite single word. In terms of *Beowulf*, it is illuminating to look at the different Anglo-Saxon words that he feels are best translated as "folk." I provide here a catalogue of Morris and Wyatt's uses of the word for only the first tenth of the poem (lines 1–319, until Beowulf arrives at Heorot);⁴² I include Earle's translations for contrast. Even in this small test group, the list is impressive.

Words (Discrete or in Compounds) Translated as "Folk" by Morris and Wyatt ⁴³	Page # (Line # in Original Poem)	Earle's Translations (Page #)
<i>ƿeod</i>	179 (2)	imperial (1)
	180 (44)	stately (2)
	184 (178)	not directly translated
<i>Folk</i>	179 (14)	people (1)
	180 (55)	nation (3)
	181 (73)	people (3)
	181 (76)	people (3)
	186 (262)	nation (9)
<i>Dene</i> (translated as "Dane-folk")	183 (155)	Danish (6)
	186 (242)	Danes (8)
	187 (271)	Danes (9)
<i>Geatas</i> (translated as "Geat-folk")	184 (195)	Goths (7)
<i>ƿeoden</i> (translated as "folk-lord")	184 (201)	ruler (7)
<i>Leod</i>	185 (205)	Leeds (7)
	185 (225)	Leeds (8)
	186 (269)	people (9)
<i>Weras</i>	185 (216)	brave men (8)
<i>Scyldingas</i> (translated as "Scylding-folk")	185 (229)	Scyldings (8)
<i>Fyrd</i>	185 (232)	not directly translated
<i>Men</i> (translated as "men-folk")	185 (233)	Men (8)
<i>Werod</i>	188 (319)	force (11)

⁴² See also Tilling, "Morris's Translation of *Beowulf*" 168, which provides a similar catalog.

⁴³ Not included in this list are Morris and Wyatt's uses of the word in their chapter titles (once) and in their opening "Argument" (three times).

Even if one counts the different racial names as one instance, this leaves nine different words that Morris and Wyatt consider to be appropriately translated as “folk,” all in variance to the choices of Earle. In terms of frequency, they use “folk” 21 times in the 319 lines, or approximately once every 15 lines. This sampling is slightly higher than the poem as a whole, in which Morris and Wyatt use the word a still remarkable 161 times, or approximately once every 20 lines. This high frequency, created by the great variety of situations in which Morris and Wyatt use the word, creates a sense of insistence in the text; the notion of “folk” is consistently and determinedly pressed upon the reader’s consciousness.

Morris and Wyatt’s insistent use of “folk” is paralleled by their avoidance of other semantically related words. We see above, for example, that Earle translates *folc* as, among other things, “nation.” Morris and Wyatt, however, use “nation” only once in their entire translation.⁴⁴ Similarly, they never use “empire” or “imperial,” never use “state” except occasionally in the form of “stately,” and use “country” only three times.⁴⁵ There is a certain historical validity to these choices, since modern understandings of these concepts, particularly “empire” and “state,” apply only problematically to Viking-Age England. But this historical awareness is secondary to the main effect of Morris and Wyatt’s extreme preference for “folk.” By eliminating these other related words, Morris and Wyatt define the semantic field of “political body” entirely by the word “folk.” This choice eliminates, or at least severely reduces, the notion of geography or territory as fundamental to the political community; the importance of the actual people to the definition of this community is expanded to fill the space left by the exclusion of geography, as it were. Moreover, the words “empire” and “state” contain within them the idea of power structures, which the word “folk” simply does not. Consequently, Morris and Wyatt reduce not only the importance of geography from the political landscape of *Beowulf* but also the importance of government. Granted, the function of the king and his close group of followers is an inherent part of *Beowulf*, so words such as “king” and “thane” are used with great regularity in Morris and Wyatt’s translation, but when combined with the overwhelming use of “folk,” the function of the kings and thanes seems to be merely an extension of the fellowship of the broader Germanic community; as Regina Hansen states, “[f]ellowship, for Morris, also implies the absence of hierarchy.”⁴⁶ By their insistence on “folk,” therefore, Morris and Wyatt present the Anglo-Saxon (and by extension, medieval Germanic)

⁴⁴ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 256.

⁴⁵ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 230, 257, and 265.

⁴⁶ Regina Hansen, “Forms of Friendship in *The Roots of the Mountains*,” *Journal of the William Morris Society* 11.3 (1995): 19–21 (19).

political unit as defined not by boundaries or by governmental bodies but first and foremost by the people: it is community, even fellowship, more than citizenship.⁴⁷ Morris declares in his essay "Early England" that *Beowulf* demonstrates that we must "live fearlessly and confident of our immortality not as individuals but as a part of the great corporation of humanity; and that I say was the faith of our forefathers."⁴⁸ In this notion of the life of the folk, perhaps more than anything else, we can see the influence of Morris and Bax's *Socialism* on Morris and Wyatt's translation of the poem.

But these issues return us to a key problem for Morris's cooption of his medieval sources, namely the frequent emphasis in these texts on the deeds of a heroic *individual* rather than on the deeds of his or her broader community. Morris was faced with the unavoidable question of how the extraordinary individual, in this case a king, could fit into a socialist view of the poem. If the populace defines the political community, what is the nature of kingship?⁴⁹ Morris seems to be grappling with this issue in the second paragraph of the poem, in which the birth of Scyld's son is described:

Ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned
geong in geardum, þone God sende
folce to frofre; fyren-ðearfe ongeat,
þæt hie ær drugon aldor-[le]ase
lange hwile. (12–16a)

("A son was afterwards born to him, young in the dwellings,
whom God sent, a comfort to the people. God perceived that

⁴⁷ Morris makes a similar case in "The Early Literature of the North – Iceland": "personal relations between men were what was considered and not territorial: when a priest or chief moved as sometimes happened, many of his thing-men accompanied him, there was no political territorial unit to which loyalty was exacted" (183).

⁴⁸ William Morris, "Early England," in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris*, 158–78 (163).

⁴⁹ This problem of the role of the extraordinary individual in an otherwise communalistic society is one that Morris grapples with in a number of texts, most notably *The House of the Wolfings*, where the hero, Thiodolf, debates whether to continue wearing a magical hauberk that makes him invincible but comes at the price of severing all of his social connections except that with his mystical lover. This loss of community causes him to exclaim, "[w]here then was life, and Thiodolf that once had lived?" (170). The hauberk subsumes the objective world within Thiodolf's subjectivity; all that exists for him are his own interests, his own desires, and through the extension of himself, his own lover. And yet, ironically, this domination of the individual over the communal leads to a loss of the self; the "Thiodolf that once had lived" cannot survive this domination. This argument seems to suggest that there is no identity outside of the communal, that communal identity and personal identity are inextricable. For one to reject community in favor of individuality, as the hauberk tempts Thiodolf to do, is therefore to reject oneself.

they previously endured dire need, lordless for a long time.”)

Morris and Wyatt translate this passage as follows:

By whom then thereafter a son was begotten,
A youngling in garth, whom the great God sent thither
To foster the folk; and their crime-need he felt
The load that lay on them while lordless they lived
For a long while and long.⁵⁰

The function of a good king is, intriguingly, not to rule or lead but “[t]o foster the folk.” The Anglo-Saxon word that they render as “foster” is *frofor* (“comfort,” “compensation,” “joy,” etc.). They accurately translate this word as “solace” a mere seven lines earlier, so there is little chance that Morris misunderstood the word. Given the fact that they change not only the meaning of the word but also its grammatical value (it is clearly a noun in the original), it becomes apparent that the change is programmatic. The placement of this change is far from accidental: the poem constructs both Scyld and his son as exemplars of proper kingship, thus offering Morris a golden opportunity to mold the very ideals of kingship to his own political viewpoint. As we saw in Morris and Bax’s *Socialism*, Morris viewed the Old North as promoting social connection by free affection rather than by blood obligation; fosterage, for Morris, perfectly exemplified this idealized form of community-building.⁵¹ A king, Morris and Wyatt here suggest, needs to have the same affection for his subjects as does a foster-parent for a foster-child, and, moreover, that king needs to earn the affection of his subjects in return, thereby uniting the political body not through geography or administration but through emotional good will. That is a good folk-king.

Morris and Wyatt maintain this notion of affection uniting the Germanic community as a theme throughout the translation; it converges again with the issue of fosterage in their rendering of Hrothgar’s pseudo-adoption of Beowulf. Hrothgar, overwhelmed with gratitude for Beowulf’s defeat of Grendel, declares:

Nu ic, Beowulf, þec,
secg betsta, me for sunu wylle
freogan on ferhþe; heald forð tela
niwe sibbe. (946b–949a)

⁵⁰ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 179.

⁵¹ Morris explores the Germanic system of fosterage elsewhere in his writings, for example in the relationship between Sigmund and Sinfjotli in *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung*.

("Now, I will love you, Beowulf, best of men, as a son to me in heart; hold forth well a new kinship/peace.")

Morris and Wyatt's translation is quite accurate:

O Beowulf, I now
Thee best of all men as a son unto me
Will love in my heart, and hold thou henceforward
Our kinship new-made now.⁵²

Morris and Wyatt's choice of "kinship" for *sibbe* is significant. *Sibbe* certainly can mean "kinship," but it can also mean "peace" or the more general "relationship," as is probably more appropriate in this instance. Morris and Wyatt's selection of "kinship" makes the potent claim that a kinship can be *niwe* ("new"), that what is normally considered a blood-bond can be created just as well by any unrelated individuals who will love each other in their hearts (*freogan on ferhpe*). Beowulf's response, and Morris and Wyatt's translation of it, is equally interesting. Beowulf immediately states that he and his companions undertook the fight *estum miclum* ("with much grace/good will") (958), which Morris and Wyatt translate as "with mickle of love."⁵³ "Love" is a possible meaning of *est*, but it is a surprising choice in this instance, since none of the previous translators had chosen anything close to that interpretation. For example, Kemble offers "pleasure,"⁵⁴ Wackerbarth "joy,"⁵⁵ Thorpe "good will,"⁵⁶ and Earle "good heart."⁵⁷ For Kemble and Wackerbarth, then, Beowulf fights Grendel simply because he enjoys a good brawl, while for Thorpe and Earle, he does so because he is good-spirited, but for Morris and Wyatt, he does so out of love. Moreover, this is not an isolated incident; Morris and Wyatt continue to assert the role of affection in community-building throughout the interactions between Hrothgar and Beowulf. For example, they translate Hrothgar's declaration, *ic þe sceal mine gelæstan / freoðe, swa wit furðum spræcon* ("I must fulfill my peace/friendship to you, just as we two previously declared"; 1706b–1707a), as "I shall make thee my love good, / As we twain at first spake it."⁵⁸ It is

⁵² Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 207.

⁵³ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 207.

⁵⁴ Kemble, trans., *A Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Poem of Beowulf*, 40.

⁵⁵ Wackerbarth, trans., *Beowulf: An Epic Poem*, 38.

⁵⁶ Thorpe, ed. and trans., *Beowulf, the Scôp or Gleeman's Tale, and the Fight at Finnesburg*, 1921.

⁵⁷ Earle, trans., *The Deeds of Beowulf*, 31.

⁵⁸ Morris and Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf*, 230.

affection, the cornerstone of Morris's notion of Germanic community, that is the motivation behind the Beowulf–Hrothgar relationship, including the rescue of Hrothgar's hall. And since Beowulf has done his deed in this spirit of fellowship, Hrothgar's response to adopt (metaphorically, or even literally) the hero is, therefore, most suitable, bringing the Geats and the Danes one step closer to organic amalgamation.

The Affectation of Archaism

These are only a few of the politically loaded translation choices that Morris and Wyatt's translation makes, but they demonstrate the broader pattern, and by extension the importance of such close analysis of Morris's translations to discussions of his politics. I will close this article by stepping back from specific translation choices to discussing Morris's archaizing translation style in general. One of the most significant nineteenth-century attacks on archaisms such as Morris's comes, perhaps not surprisingly, from Guðbrandur Vigfússon, who was something of a scholarly nemesis of Morris's Icelandic translating partner, Eiríkur.⁵⁹ Guðbrandur and his own collaborator, F. York Powell, assert the following:

There is one grave error into which too many English translators of old Northern and Icelandic writings have fallen, to wit, the *affectation of archaism*, and the abuse of archaic, Scottish, pseudo-Middle-English words. This abominable fault makes a Saga, for instance, sound unreal, unfamiliar, false; it conceals all diversities of style and tone beneath a fictitious mask of monotonous uniformity, and slurs over the real difficulties by a specious nullity of false phrasing.⁶⁰

The charge of an “affectation of archaism” has some validity, and not only for Morris's particular translation style; as Susan Bassnett has pointed out in her overview of the field of Translation Studies, the archaizing impulse was particularly strong in the nineteenth century, often out of a desire to create “period flavour.”⁶¹ Such flavor is certainly one of Morris's motivations, but the term “affectation” nonetheless applies only problematically to Morris's

⁵⁹ Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians*, 356, indicates that “the two men, friends when they arrived in Britain, became deadly enemies in a private philological war worthy of the rawest Sturlung-age conflict [...] . They squabbled in print over anything and everything.”

⁶⁰ Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, ed., *Corpus Poeticum Boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), 1: cxv.

⁶¹ Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 19.

translation style, given the intensity and sincerity of Morris's beliefs about the aesthetic, linguistic, and cultural community of the Old North.

Gary Aho suggests that at times Morris's archaisms do indeed go too far in terms of foreignizing the text, becoming "almost self-indulgent"; he suggests that at these times Morris is "allowing his delight to cloud meaning for most of his readers."⁶² Randolph Quirk takes a different tack; rather than arguing the aesthetic value (or lack thereof) of Morris's archaisms, he probes instead the translation philosophy behind them. Referring specifically to Morris's saga translations, Quirk suggests that Morris wrote his translations in such a way that his audience "must read the sagas with just that extra concentration and care that Morris himself had to use; they must find them couched in a language which would be as intelligible to them as Icelandic was to him but which would have the same areas of unfamiliarity too."⁶³ Quirk, therefore, suggests that Morris was not simply foreignizing or familiarizing, but attempting to construct a text that would simulate for his audience the reading experience of a learned, but not entirely fluent, student of the translated language. From this perspective, Morris's goal was to create something suggestively familiar and suggestively foreign at the same time. In part, Morris simply wanted to recreate for his audience the same joy that he experienced in working out the meaning of a text that is on the edge of familiarity; however, he also wanted to demonstrate that while Old Icelandic and Old English may be only distantly related to Modern English, they are nonetheless related. Morris may have hoped that the distance between the medieval and the modern languages would serve as a reminder for his readers of the unfortunate distance between modern society and its superior medieval forebears; the fact that the relationship between the languages is still recognizable, however, may reflect Morris's hope that the medieval Germanic spirit of communality nevertheless still resides within the modern English character.

On top of helping to define the relationship between the Old North and modern England, Morris's archaizing style infects the nature of the relationship between his translations and his socialist writings. Morris's socialist papers and his *Socialism* make sweeping claims about the Old North, but do not offer much in the line of direct evidence of those claims. Morris's translations, on the other hand, offer those unable to read Old English or Old Icelandic more immediate access to the original culture and, by extension, to the evidence Morris saw as backing his claims. Such direct access is, of course, illusory: the interpretations of any translator, already influ-

⁶² Aho, Introduction to *Three Northern Love Stories*, xix–xx.

⁶³ Randolph Quirk, "Dasent, Morris, and Problems of Translation," *Saga-Book* 14.1–2 (1953–57): 64–77 (76).

enced by existing traditions of translation and criticism, automatically and unavoidably intrude between a reader and the source text (let alone the source culture, which is one further step removed). The more archaizing the translation, however, the stronger the illusion of direct access, and Morris and Wyatt's *Beowulf* takes this impulse to the extreme. Their translation is unrelentingly archaic, making it truly difficult to read, but this very difficulty makes the text seem to be almost not a translation at all. Through his *Beowulf*, therefore, Morris offered to his audience what seems to be unmediated proof of the claims in his political writings about the Germanic world. Therein lies the sleight of hand; as the above comparison between Morris and Wyatt's translation and its predecessors shows, not only was the access highly mediated, but it was also highly political. The translations, therefore, are an integral element of Morris's broader rhetorical arsenal. Just as Morris's romances take up the socialist message of his essays and speeches, only in a less direct manner, so too do his translations. In this way, Morris's translations are actually more than simply a way of better understanding his corpus of socialist writings; they are themselves integral specimens of that very same corpus, actively participating in its political work.

“We Wol Sleen this False Traytor Deeth” The Search for Immortality in Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale and J. K. Rowling’s *The Deathly Hallows*

Alison Gulley

In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the seventh and final installment of the Harry Potter series, while engaged in a search for the dark wizard Lord Voldemort, Harry and his friends learn about the Hallows – three magical objects that give their possessor the power to overcome death – from a children’s fairy tale called “The Three Brothers.” In the story, which appears in a collection of tales by the medieval writer Beedle the Bard, three brothers (later identified as the Peverell brothers), traveling along a dark road at night, come to a river too deep to cross, so they wave their magic wands and make a bridge. Halfway across, they encounter the hooded figure of Death, who, angry that he has been cheated out of three new victims, pretends to congratulate them on their magic. He tells them that they have each earned a prize for being so clever. The oldest brother, a combative man, asks for a wand that will always win duels for its owner, so Death fashions him a wand from the wood of an elder tree. The second brother, an arrogant man, who wants to humiliate Death even further, asks for the power to recall others from death. So, Death gives him a stone from the riverbank, with the power to bring back the dead. The youngest brother, humble and wise, does not trust Death and asks for something that will let him leave that place without being followed. Death reluctantly gives him a Cloak of Invisibility. The three brothers then depart. The first soon gets into a fight, and, victorious, boasts of the wand that he got from Death himself. That night, another wizard waits until the brother has drunk himself into a stupor and then slits his throat and steals the wand. “And so Death took the first brother for his own,”

Rowling writes (DH 408).¹ Meanwhile, the second brother, at home, turns his stone over three times, and his fiancée, who had died before they could marry, appears. However, like the returning son in William Jacob's horror story "The Monkey's Paw," she has not truly come back to life but has merely returned from the dead; sad and cold and seemingly separated from him by a curtain, "she had returned to the mortal world," but suffered because she did not belong there. Eventually driven mad by longing, the brother kills himself in order to join her: "And so Death took the second brother for his own" (DH 409).² The third brother evades Death for many years. When he attains old age, he removes the Invisibility Cloak, gives it to his son, and greets Death gladly as an old friend and equal.

Medievalists, and perhaps astute high-school and college students, will immediately recognize the similarity between this fairy tale and Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale." J. K. Rowling, in an online live chat with her fans about *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, was asked, "Were the deathly hallows [sic] based on any realworld [sic] myth or faerie tale [?]" Her response, "Perhaps 'the Pardoner's Tale', by Chaucer," seems a throwaway answer, but upon reflection it is almost surely more than that.³

It is clear from the very first book of the Harry Potter series that the author has drawn from the medieval world as popularly conceived. The wizarding school that Harry and his friends attend is housed in Hogwarts, a medieval castle filled with Gothic wonders such as ghosts, suits of armor that Harry swears move on their own, and floating candlesticks and goblets. Rowling has called T. H. White's Wart (the young King Arthur from *The Once and Future King*) Harry's "spiritual ancestor."⁴ Further, Harry's owl Hedwig recalls Merlin's owl Archimedes; the self-cleaning dishes in the Weasley household mimic Merlin's housewares; and Merlin himself, of course, is a fine model for the headmaster Dumbledore. Sporting long hair and a beard, wizard's

¹ J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007), 408. (DH) The other books from the seven-book series to which I refer here, in order of composition, are *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 1999) (SS); *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2004) (OP); and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2006) (HBP).

² W. W. Jacob, "The Monkey's Paw," *The Raven and the Monkey's Paw: Classics of Horror and Suspense*, Modern Library Edition (New York: Modern Library, 1998), 201–10. Like "The Three Brothers," the short story illustrates the folly not only of attempting to cheat death, but of rash wishes in general.

³ < <http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org/2007/7/30/j-k-rowling-web-chat-transcript.>>, 30 July 2007, last accessed 10 October 2012.

⁴ "J. K. Rowling," *The Guardian*, 22 July 2008, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk>>, last accessed 6 June 2012.

hat and robes, Dumbledore continues the tradition not of the mad prophet, shape-shifter, or advisor of Uther from the medieval chronicles, but of the loving and wise (and at times fun-loving) mentor that appears in White's novel and its later cinematic incarnations.

Elsewhere, the coats of arms of the Hogwarts houses recall medieval heraldry and feature a lion, serpent, badger, and raven, animals found in medieval bestiaries. Harry and his fellow students learn about this fantastical menagerie in one of their classes, Care of Magical Creatures, and often encounter such beasts in the halls of Hogwarts itself (a basilisk and a phoenix) or the Forbidden Forest (unicorns and hippogriffs). Several scholars have written on this aspect of Rowling's medievalism. Maria Cecire identifies the Harry Potter books as belonging to a new series of medievalism that can be differentiated from that of the earlier Oxford School of children's authors like J. R. R. Tolkien, who, as a scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, not surprisingly relied heavily on medieval texts for his inspiration and subject matter. Although Rowling is obviously influenced by such fantasy fiction, we see in her use of such characters as the centaur Firenze the importance of C. S. Lewis's classically influenced "medievalised landscape."⁵ But Gail Orgelfinger argues for a more specific, if still nuanced, appropriation of the medieval bestiary. In 2001, Rowling published, under the pseudonym Newt Scamander, the Hogwarts "textbook" *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, a book reminiscent in appearance and content of medieval bestiaries.⁶ Although this text does not include the Christian allegory of its medieval ancestors, it does, Orgelfinger writes, "[underscore] the symbolic potential of the bestiaries to serve as an index for the many animals that either chart Harry's human potential to combat evil, or foreshadow the Christ-like sacrifice that enables him to conquer evil by the end of the series, or both."⁷

In the same way that Rowling's appropriation of the medieval bestiary does not overtly moralize or allegorize, and yet still imbues the text with theological richness, her use of another medieval source, the Pardoner's Tale, enriches our understanding of one of the book series' most important themes. As Rowling herself said in an interview, one of the fundamental decisions she made about the series was that magic could not bring back the dead.⁸

⁵ Maria Cecire, "Medievalism, Popular Culture and National Identity in Children's Fantasy Literature," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 9 (2009): 395–409 (398).

⁶ J. K. Rowling, as Newt Scamander, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (New York: Scholastic Books, 2001).

⁷ Gail Orgelfinger, "J. K. Rowling's Medieval Bestiary," *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer 2009), 141–60 (141).

⁸ Interview by Christopher Lydon, *The Connection*, National Public Radio, WBUR, Boston, 12 October 1999.

The immortality that the two Peverell brothers and Harry's archenemy, Lord Voldemort, seek is shown to be only a simulacrum of life, just as the attempt by the three rioters in Chaucer's exemplum to "sleen deeth" will lead not to eternal life in this world but to the demise of the soul.

Although in many ways the two morality tales may seem to share only surface similarities, the commonalities are in fact deeper, beginning with the use of the tale in a pilgrimage setting colored by sickness and death. As Celia Lewis points out, "*The Canterbury Tales*, like other medieval story collections such as the *Thousand and One Nights* or the *Decameron*, is framed by death;"⁹ yet, where the latter, for example, specifically references the threat of the plague, the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* does so more subtly when the narrator explains that the pilgrims will travel to Canterbury "the hooly blissful martyr for to seke,/ That hem hath holpen whan that they were seek," lines that note both the pilgrims' "mortal incentive" and the "successful deferral of death thanks to St. Thomas' intercession."¹⁰ As William Snell writes, "The point is that far from ignoring the plague, as some have suggested, Chaucer could not but allude to it by the very fact that it is implicit in the whole concept of the pilgrimage."¹¹ The mention of Canterbury itself would have evoked feelings of mortality for it was frequently visited throughout the fourteenth century for its healing powers. At Becket's shrine, the sick could purchase drops of his blood mixed with water.¹²

Likewise, Rowling's morality tale of the three brothers is framed by a quest that, while not strictly a pilgrimage, contains many elements in common with the medieval practice. Several definitions of pilgrimages have been advanced, but a few points seem applicable here. Matthew Dillon explains that a pilgrimage could be "any journey undertaken for a specifically religious purpose, [which] involved an overnight stay."¹³ Surinder Bhardwaj adds that trips could be long and difficult for spiritual benefit and enlightenment or shorter and easier, perhaps for "mundane, problem-solving purposes."¹⁴ A key element in all pilgrimages, however, is "self-abnegation and abandon-

⁹ Celia Lewis, "Framing Fiction with Death: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and the Plague," *New Readings of Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. Robert G. Benson and Susan Janet Ridyard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), 139–64 (142).

¹⁰ Lewis, "Framing Fiction," 146; GP II. 17–18.

¹¹ William Snell, "Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale and Pestilence in Late Medieval Literature," *Studies in Medieval Language and Literature* 10 (1995): 1–16 (3).

¹² Lewis, "Framing Fiction," 146.

¹³ Matthew Dillon, *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 1997), xviii.

¹⁴ Surinder M. Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 158–59, 162.

ment of familiar ties.”¹⁵ These components are all present at some level as Harry, Ron, and Hermione leave the familiar comforts of school and home, friends and family. On the way, they share many of the adventures that one might find on a medieval pilgrimage: Harry and Hermione visit the grave of his parents, heroes to the Wizard world, and the site of their death, where shrines have been erected in their memory; Harry carefully carries with him in a small bag around his neck the relics that keep the memory of his parents and his mentor and teacher, the great Albus Dumbledore, alive. The course they follow becomes a strangely perverted pilgrimage route as they trace the path that Voldemort, the most powerful dark wizard ever known, took in his life, seeking those places that hold special significance for him and those items that might serve as a reliquary for his ruined soul. And, in fact, because of the journey’s main goal, death pervades the friends’ time together just as it does the Canterbury pilgrims’: they seek to recover seven of those reliquaries, called Horcruxes, which are artifacts that house pieces of Voldemort’s soul. As the Dark Lord, Voldemort is truly the metaphorical plague of the wizard world and, indeed, the Muggle (non-wizard) world. If Harry, Ron, and Hermione are able to destroy the Horcruxes and Voldemort, and by extension his followers (the Death Eaters), they will succeed in ridding the world of his threat.

More immediate than the physical death that imbues either pilgrimage, however, is the question of spiritual sickness and immortality. In addition to the just-listed reasons for embarking on a medieval pilgrimage, the presence of the Pardoner among the Canterbury pilgrims highlights perhaps one of the most important reasons: the performance of penance. Although pilgrimages were frequently required by canon or even civil law, there does not seem to be that kind of penitent among the “sondry folk” (indeed, one wonders whether some of the pilgrims feel guilt about anything!), but certainly the Knight in his “bismotered [...] habergeoun,[...] late come ycome from his viage” appears to be performing penance for his recent fighting in the Crusades. And with his wallet full of pardons and his bag of false relics, the Pardoner is ready to serve (GP, ll. 76–77),¹⁶ for what is the Pardoner himself, if not a figure to aid in achieving eternal spiritual life? As he assures the pilgrims at the end of his tale, “Myn hooly pardoun mayyow alle warice” (PardT, l. 906):

Your names I entre heer in my rolle anon;
Into the blisse of heven shul ye gon.

¹⁵ Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (New York: Hambledon, 2000), xiii.

¹⁶ All references are from *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

I yow assoille by myn heigh power,
 Yow that wol offer, as clen and eek as cleer
 As ye were born. – And lo, sires, thus I preche.
 And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
 So graunte yow his pardoun to receive [...]. (ll. 911–97)¹⁷

In the same way, Harry, Ron, and Hermione are driven by a fear of not only physical death but also spiritual death. At one point in *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry and Hermione visit his parents' grave in Godric's Hollow. Harry is alarmed to discover the words written on their grave:

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." A horrible thought came to him, and with it a kind of panic. "Isn't that a Death Eater idea? Why is that there?" "It doesn't mean defeating death in the way the Death Eaters mean it, Harry," said Hermione, her voice gentle. "It means ... you know ... living beyond death. Living after death."
 (DH 328)

Harry does not recognize the epitaph as 1 Cor. 5:26, for at this point he does not fully understand the spiritual mysteries illustrated in part by both morality tales or by the journey he has undertaken. The intrusion of a pointed Christian reference here may surprise some readers because of the hostility toward the books from many conservative Christian quarters, which has been met with an equally adamant apologetic tradition. However, Rowling's fictive world is, like many western fictive worlds, putatively Christian. Hagrid hauls in Christmas trees to Hogwarts's Great Hall, which he decorates with real, live fairies; and Halloween seems the same holiday of wholesome trickery as it is to most people, rather than a day leading up to the Feast of All Saints. No one heads off to services in either event, and, as Shira Wolosky notes of the two specifically religious events in the entire series, "The wizard who officiates at both Dumbledore's funeral and Bill and Fleur's wedding is entirely generalized, and the ceremonies include no explicitly religious formulae."¹⁸ And, indeed, if Rowling can be said to have advanced any theology of the soul, it might be identified again in only the most general

¹⁷ "My holy pardon will cure you all [...] / I enter your names here in my rolls quickly;/ You shall go into the bliss of heaven./ I will absolve you by my high power;/ You who make offerings as clean and clear/ as you were born. – And lo, sires, thus I preach./ And may Jesus Christ, who is our soul's healer, so grant you that you may receive his pardon" (all modernizations are mine).

¹⁸ Shira Wolosky, "Harry Potter's Ethical Paradigms: Augustine, Kant, and Feminist Moral Theory," *Children's Literature* 40 (2012): 191–217 (193).

of terms, as loosely Platonic. For example, all the paintings at Hogwarts move and talk, but the portraits of former headmasters appear to have life in them, in the sense that they can communicate with the living, although they cannot leave their frames except to visit the frames of others. Ghosts wander the halls of Hogwarts, seemingly happy in their state celebrating Death Days and holding Headless Hunts and Balls, until an episode toward the end of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Struck with the realization that his recently deceased godfather Sirius Black might return from the dead like Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor House, ghost Harry seeks out the ghost:

“[Sirius] can come back, right?”

Nick turned away from the window and looked mournfully at Harry.

“He won’t come back.”

“Who?”

“Sirius Black,” said Nick.

“But you did!” said Harry angrily. “You came back – you’re dead and you didn’t disappear –”

“Wizards can leave an imprint of themselves upon the earth, to walk palely where their living selves once trod,” said Nick miserably. “But very few wizards choose that path.”

“Why not? [...] Why doesn’t everyone come back? Why isn’t this place full of ghosts? Why – ?” [...].

“I was afraid of death,” said Nick. “I chose to remain behind [...]. I know nothing of the secrets of death, [...] Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead.” (OP 860–61)

When Voldemort and his followers speak of conquering Death, it is not to achieve this “feeble imitation of life,” but what they believe to be true physical immortality. But the epitaph, and the fate of the three brothers, shows us that this can never be. Hermione likewise states at a later point in the series (with specific reference to the Resurrection Stone, the “reward” given to the second Peverell brother), “No magic can raise the dead, and that’s that! [...] Pale imitations aren’t the same as bringing someone back to life” (DH 427); she might not put it in Christian terms, but she clearly understands the sentiment on the gravestone to be a reference to eternal spiritual life rather than material existence.

The tension between physical and spiritual sickness and between death and immortality that is evoked by the frame narrative of the General Prologue and echoed in Rowling’s work is made explicit in her source, the Pardoner’s Tale. The main plot of the story is actuated by the death of the three rioters’ friend by plague, but set alongside this bodily illness is the more serious spir-

itual illness, and from the beginning, if anyone is likely to experience eternal death it is these three: "They daunce and pleyen at dees both day and nyght,/ And eten also and drynken over hir might," and "doon the devel sacrifice [...] by superfluitee abhomynable." They consort with "tombesteres,/ Fetys and smale, and yonge frutesteres,/ Syngeres with harpes, baudes, wafereres,/ Whiche been the verray devels officers." Then "Oure blissed Lordes body they totere," and if this is not enough "ech of hem at others synne lough"! (ll. 466–69, 471, 477–78, 473, and 476).¹⁹

That they fail to repent of these and other sins becomes apparent quickly as the tale progresses. They are obviously caught by death unaware, and thus unshriven, but arguably Chaucer's audience would have known from the initial appearance of the Old Man that eternal damnation was to be their lot. This figure has elicited much critical discussion over the years beginning with Kittredge's influential reading of him as "undoubtedly Death in person."²⁰ Christopher Dean, in seeking to make sense of the many interpretations of the Old Man, offers a compelling solution, one that applies just as well to Rowling's exemplum of the three brothers. "The first problem to decide in discussing the role of the Old Man," he writes, "is that of the stage on which we are to see him." He asks the question, "Is his role limited to the exemplum alone or does it transcend this to embrace in some way the Pardoner himself?"²¹ For him, the Pardoner's stern warning in the person of the Old Man shows God's mercy to the rioters and by extension the pilgrims and later, when they fail to heed the warning, His damnation.

The ability to shift between frame and story, teller and character, can be applied elsewhere. Peter Beidler notes that "of all the early tellers of the famous story of evil men whose greed leads them to their death after finding a pile of gold, Chaucer alone places his version in plague times"²² and suggests that by understanding the very real backdrop of the plague for this tale, "Chaucer probably viewed that exemplum not as supernatural or mysterious, but as realistic and contemporary."²³ A. C. Spearing also notes the flux

¹⁹ "They dance and play at dice both day and night,/ And also eat and drink beyond their capacity./ [...] They] make sacrifice to the devil [...] through abominable excess." They consort with "elegant and slender dancing girls, and young female fruit sellers,/ Singers with harps, pimps, sellers of wafers,/ Who are the officers of the devil himself." They "destroy Our blessed Lord's body" and "each of them laughs at the other's sin."

²⁰ G. L. Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 125.

²¹ Christopher Dean, "Salvation, Damnation, and the Role of the Old Man in 'The Pardoner's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 9 (1975): 44–49 (45).

²² Peter G. Beidler, "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner," *The Chaucer Review* 16 (1982): 257–69 (257).

²³ Beidler, "The Plague," 260.

between literal and metaphorical in the tale: "The basic story of the quest for death depends on our understanding the personification of death as literally true, not metaphorical, until it emerges that the revelers 'find Death' not as a person but in the shape of their own *cupiditas*."²⁴ The fluidity between the Old Man and the Pardoner and the literal and the metaphorical is similarly present in the tale of "The Three Brothers." To Ron, who grew up in the wizarding world, it is just a fairy tale; to Hermione, who first reads the story in the collection of *Tales of Beedle the Bard* that Professor Dumbledore leaves to her in his will, the story is part of the puzzle in defeating the dark wizard Voldemort; to Xenophilius Lovegood, at whose house Harry first hears the tale, the fairy tale in the form heard here is merely a story meant to amuse, while the ancient story itself "refers to three objects, or Hallows, which, if united, will make the possessor master of Death" (DH 410). As it turns out, they are all right, and there are many important lessons to be learned just as there are from the Pardoner's Tale.

Despite the slipperiness of the Old Man's identity, two interpretations provide a context for understanding Rowling's use of her source here, both of which rely on the subtle suggestion that whoever he is, the Pardoner's Old Man is someone who wishes to die but cannot. The relevant lines are:

"[Moot] I han myn age stille
 As longe tyme as it is Goddes will.
 Ne deeth, alas, ne wol nat han my lyf.
 Thus walke I lyk a resteles kaityf.
 [...]
 Lo, how I vanysshe, flesh and blood and skyn.
 Alas, whan shul my bones been at reste?" (ll. 725–33)²⁵

Elizabeth R. Hatcher notes that the Old Man appears and speaks these lines soon after the rioters have drunkenly declared to each other, upon learning of their friend's death, "Is it such peril with [Death] to meete? [...] We wol sleen this false traytour Deeth" (ll. 693 and 700).²⁶ This timely appearance, coupled with his desire to die, signals to her that he represents the common folklore motif of the "rash wish."²⁷ Thus, he shows what would

²⁴ A. C. Spearing, "Introduction," *Chaucer: The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1–49 (37).

²⁵ "I must keep my age still/ As long a time as it is God's will./ Death will not, alas, have my life./ Thus I walk like a restless wretch./ [...] Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin./ Alas, when shall my bones be at rest?"

²⁶ "Is it such peril to meet with Death? [...] We will slay this false traitor Death."

²⁷ See Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana

happen should their wish – that is, to slay death – come true. Yes, Death would die, but Old Age would live forever, and physical immortality, as the second Peverell brother discovered, would be a curse, not a blessing. In contrast to Christ's offer of spiritual grace after a physical death, "these drunken redeemers equate physical perpetuity with heaven. The Old Man demonstrates that this failure of spiritual understanding would usher in, not utopia, but a geriatric inferno." His existence, therefore, shows the limitations of the rioters' quest and illustrates their "spiritual blindness."²⁸

In Harry Potter's world, Voldemort suffers from a similar spiritual blindness. What he sees in the morality tale of the three brothers is a path to physical perpetuity rather than a warning against the folly of such a desire. Susan Johnston points out that "[it is] important to note that Voldemort's flight from death – literally, vol-de-mort – is toward immortality, rather than eternal life."²⁹ She contextualizes her argument with Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 encyclical, *Spe salvi*, which speaks not of Voldemort but certainly of those like him, to explain such benightedness: "What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment. To continue living for ever – endlessly – appears more like a curse than a gift."³⁰ From the beginning of the series, Voldemort's life has clearly been cursed. When Harry first learns that his parents died not in a car accident as he was led to believe, but through a killing curse cast by Voldemort, he asks Hagrid:

"But what happened to Vol-, sorry – I mean, You-Know-Who?"
 "Good question, Harry." [Hagrid replies.] "Disappeared. Vanished. Same night he tried ter kill you. [...] Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough human left in him to die."
 (SS 57)

University Press, 1955–58), "Wish," "Wishes," Section J1700–J2749, "fools (and Other Unwise Persons)," esp. J2070–79, "Absurd Wishes"; and cross references. Alicia K. Nitecki also draws attention to the later lines in which the earth rejects him, giving the impression that "Death and Earth [are] closing ranks against the ancient and leaving him desolate. The image of maternal Earth rejecting her son stresses the extremity of his exile." "The Convention of the Old Man's Lament in 'The Pardoner's Tale,'" *The Chaucer Review* 16.1 (1981): 76–84 (81).

²⁸ Elizabeth R. Hatcher, "Life Without Death: The Old Man in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale," *The Chaucer Review* 9 (1975): 246–52 (247).

²⁹ Susan Johnston, "Harry Potter, Eucatastrophe, and Christian Hope," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 14.1 (2011): 69–90 (78).

³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* (2007), 10, in Johnston, "Harry Potter, Eucatastrophe," 78.

From this point on, the glimpses we get of Voldemort throughout the series are indeed of a figure living a seemingly partial existence, fleeing death, yet already there – the “feeble” and “pale imitation” of life that has been spoken of. His name itself reflects this tension. As Johnston notes, Voldemort means “flight from death,” but it also can mean “the will of or toward death.” His followers are called Death Eaters, as if they can somehow control or overcome death, yet as Dumbledore tells him in *The Order of the Phoenix*, “[you] cannot imagine anything ‘worse than death,’” and, in fact, “[Your] failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness” (OP 514). Voldemort’s actions illustrate this repeatedly. In the first book, *The Sorcerer’s Stone*, Harry first sees him, a hooded figure, “crawling across the ground like some stalking beast,” to drink the blood of a slain unicorn, which will keep one alive, even if only an inch from death, but at a horrible cost: someone who has drunk the blood of a unicorn has “slain something pure and defenseless to save [himself]” and, like the Pardoner’s Old Man embodying the rash promise, “will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches [his] lips.” Although Voldemort fails to understand the significance, Harry grasps it immediately: “But who’d be that desperate? [...] If you’re going to be cursed forever, death’s better, isn’t it?” (SS 258). Ominously, the world of Harry Potter is filled with many such cursed objects.

Although the mirror of Erised (“desire” spelled backwards) ultimately helps Harry overcome Voldemort at the end of the first book, Dumbledore warns him of its danger: “It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. [...] However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge nor truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (SS 213). The sorcerer’s stone, Voldemort’s main goal for obvious reasons in the first book, is likewise dangerous. It will of course “transform any metal into pure gold,” but more than that “[it] also produces the Elixir of Life, which will make the drinker immortal” (SS 220). But as Dumbledore explains to Harry, “the trouble is, humans do have a knack of choosing precisely those things that are worse for them” (SS 297).

The most troubling of all, however, is the Horcrux, an object in which a person has concealed part of his or her soul. What makes it so cursed is the method of and purpose for its creation. In the sixth book, *The Half-Blood Prince*, we see, through a flashback, Voldemort as the Hogwarts student Tom Riddle, asking Professor Slughorn to explain how one goes about it:

“Well, you split your soul, you see,” said Slughorn, “and hide part of it in an object outside the body. Then, even if one’s body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound

and undamaged. But of course, existence in such a form ... few would want it Tom, very few. Death would be preferable." (HBP 497)

The point is, of course, that Voldemort, spiritually blind like two of the three brothers and the three rioters before them, does want this, whatever the consequences.

A second interpretation of the Old Man's character, then, relevant to Rowling's adaptation of Chaucer, sheds light on this aspect of Voldemort's character. L. O. Purdon argues that the Pardoner, keen on squeezing as much money from his audience as he can, uses every means possible to frighten them into repentance, including the theological concept of the Second Death. He writes:

It stands to reason in a "moral tale" about the wages of sin and death like the Pardoner's that the second death or eternal punishment would also be included as are examples of physical and spiritual death. After all, what more expeditious means would the Pardoner have to separate his "lewd" audiences from their "pens" while making them aware of the need for repentance and the avoidance of sin than the evocation of the horror of eternal post-mortem torment? What more theologically accurate description, moreover, could the Pardoner himself include in his tale to complete his self-revelation than the embodiment in the Old Man figure of the ultimate punishment meted out to those living their lives in despair by sinning against the Holy Spirit?³¹

The Second Death is mentioned in the New Testament four times, all in the Book of Revelation, where it cryptically refers to the fate of the wicked, that is, those who have not repented. In contrast to Christians who have remained firm in their faith in the face of persecution (John refers specifically to martyrs here), the wicked will suffer eternal damnation. Chaucer, like all medieval Christians, would have been very familiar with this eschatological concept, but even more so because, as he writes in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, he translated Pope Innocent III's *De miseriis humane conditionis*, a highly influential work dealing with Christ's Second Coming and the torments of Hell.³² Although his translation is presumably now lost,

³¹ L. O. Purdon, "The Pardoner's Old Man and the Second Death," *Studies in Philology* 89 (1992): 334–49 (335).

³² He refers to his translation "in prose" of the "Wretched Engendrynge of Mankynde," Prologue G, ll. 413–14. For a discussion of the controversies surrounding Chaucer's meaning here, see Robert Enzer Lewis, "What Did Chaucer Mean by 'Of the Wretched Engendrynge of Mankynde?,'" *The Chaucer Review* 2 (1968): 139–58.

he makes use of the work in both the Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale and the Tale itself.³³

According to Innocent III, "the wicked, as if eaten by death, spring to life again to die once more, and so are eternally dying." He cites Rev. 9:6, "Then death will never die, and those who are dead to life will live for death alone. They will seek death and never find it, have had life and lost it. Hear what John says in the Apocalypse: 'In those days men will seek death and they will not find it, and they will desire to die and death will flee from them.'" ³⁴ Innocent III further describes the horrors of this state, of eternal suffering that occurs after the first, mortal death:

"They are laid in hell like sheep; death will feed on them." (Psalm 68. 15) This text is based on the similarity of the damned souls to beasts of burden, who do not tear up the grass by the roots but only chew the top, so that the grass grows again for pasture. [...] O death, how sweet you would be to these souls who when alive thought you so bitter, they will long for you and you alone – they who had despised you in life.³⁵

According to Purdon, we are to understand that the Old Man exists in this eternal state of torment because of his physical appearance – he is "forwrapped" (completely wrapped up) except for his wrinkled face, his clothing recalling a medieval shroud – and his "sorry grace," which Purdon describes as "less than living but more than death."³⁶ These descriptions could just as easily refer to Voldemort. Compellingly, the lessons to be learned from the interaction of the Old Man as Second Death with the Pardoner, who as an unrepentant sinner is perhaps himself destined to suffer its horrors, are the same lessons to be learned from the unrepentant Dark Lord likewise interacting with the morality tale "The Three Brothers."

In several crucial ways, Voldemort bears many similarities to the Old Man in the person of the Second Death. Believed by most wizards to be dead, Voldemort returns in a weakened form after many years in hiding. In the first book, Dumbledore tells Harry that Voldemort, "Not being truly

³³ Mary Hamel, "The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale," in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales I*, ed. Robert M. Correale with Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 280–81. Lewis's careful discussion of the similarities between the *De Miseria* and the Pardoner's Tale appears in *De Miseria condicionis humane*, ed. Robert E. Lewis (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 8–12.

³⁴ See Pardoner's Tale, ll. 727–38.

³⁵ PL 217. 740–41; trans. Margaret Mary Dietz, *On the Misery of the Human Condition*, in *Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds*, ed. Robert P. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 490.

³⁶ Purdon, "The Pardoner's Old Man," 343.

alive [...] cannot be killed" (SS 298). When Harry encounters him in *The Goblet of Fire* before he magically attains his full bodily form, he is dressed like the Old Man, in a cloak that when pulled back reveals a being "hairless and scaly-looking," with arms and legs "thin and feeble" (GF 640). His followers, aptly known as Death Eaters, appear when he calls them to do his bidding, and in a chilling scene in *The Deathly Hallows* appropriately titled "Dark Lord Ascending," which both echoes the passage from *De Miseria* and parodies the Last Supper, we see Voldemort and these followers seated around a table as they plan to capture and kill Harry. The scene ends with the death of Hogwarts professor Charity Burbage (her first name hardly seems accidental) and with Voldemort then feeding her body to his snake Nagini. More significant is that, also like the Old Man, he is apparently, as we find out later, past the point of redemption.

Harry at first does not recognize this. Toward the end of the novel, Harry has been killed by Voldemort, but in a moment of Tolkienian eucatastrophe, what Tolkien describes as "a sudden and miraculous grace" or "the joy of deliverance," even as it "does not deny the existence of [...] sorrow and failure," his sacrifice has been repaid with resurrection.³⁷ He finds himself in King's Cross station (again, much can be made of the name here) with his late mentor Dumbledore, and as he looks around he spots something that makes him recoil:

It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath. [...] He ought to comfort it, but it repulsed him.
"You cannot help."

He spun around. Albus Dumbledore was walking toward him.

(DH 706–7)

We are to understand that the abhorrent bundle is a piece of Voldemort's soul, irreparable, because, as Slughorn had told Harry, "the soul is supposed to remain intact and whole. Splitting it is an act of violation, it is against nature" (HBP 498). Voldemort's fear of death has led him to reject the possibility of salvation, while Harry's willingness to sacrifice himself, to embrace the possibility of death, as Dumbledore would have it, has left him open to salvation. Like the third brother, he will greet Death, and thus eternal life, as an old friend when the time comes. Conversely, Voldemort, like the

³⁷ See Johnston, "Harry Potter, Eucatastrophe," for a full discussion of this idea. Tolkien introduces the concept of eucatastrophe in "On Fairy Stories," *Tree and Leaf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 3–83. The quote here is at 68.

Pardoner's Old Man and the other two brothers, in spiritual ignorance seeks to slay the false traitor death and therefore lives in despair. Harry, living in grace and hope, offers him one last chance which we know he will not, and cannot, theologically take: "I'd advise you to think about what you've done. ... Think, and try for some remorse, Riddle. [...]" "It's your one last chance," said Harry, "it's all you've got left. [...] I've seen what you'll be otherwise. ... Be a man ... try ... Try for some remorse" (DH 741). Harry unwittingly asks Voldemort to cast off the old self, as St. Paul bids, or perhaps to "become as young children" (Matt. 18:3) because, as Charles Taliaferro notes:

[When Harry tells Voldemort to feel remorse he] does not use the title Voldemort, "He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named," or the Dark Lord, but instead his given name: Tom Riddle. Harry seems to be calling Riddle back from his role as a menacing, almost supernatural Dark Lord to take ownership of himself as Tom Riddle, the confused, angry, but highly promising child. [...] In other words, Riddle needs to shed or die to his past evil intentions and acts.³⁸

Instead, like the eternal denizens of hell in *De Miseria*, Voldemort and his followers have eaten death and in turn "are eternally dying" themselves.

In opposition to the bitterness of this death, however, stands the full promise of eternal life. Arguably, such is the example from the very first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The stone, which is being kept in the dungeons of Hogwarts after centuries in the possession of the alchemist Nicolas Flamel, falls into the hands of Professor Quirrell, who has been seeking it while under the control of Voldemort. In the book's climax, Harry wrests the stone from Professor Quirrell. After fighting and escaping the Dark Lord for what will be the first of many times, Harry awakens in the Hogwarts infirmary to find Professor Dumbledore smiling down at him. The stone, he learns, "has been destroyed":

"Destroyed?" said Harry blankly. "But your friend – Nicolas Flamel –"

"Oh, you know about Nicolas?" said Dumbledore, sounding quite delighted. [...] "Well, Nicolas and I have had a little chat, and agreed it's all for the best."

"But that means he and his wife will die, won't they?"

³⁸ Charles Taliaferro, "The Real Secret of the Phoenix: Regeneration through Death," *The Ultimate Harry Potter and Philosophy Book*, ed. Greg Basshan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 229–45 (231).

[...].

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry's face.

"To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, *very* long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." (SS 297)

The promise of the great adventure in the first novel continues to be held out in the example of the third Peverell brother who "greet[s] Death like an old friend and an equal," by the forgiveness offered by the Pardoner, no matter how fraudulent and unrepentant he is himself, and by the warning of the Old Man. While the three revelers in Chaucer's morality tale experience the first death at each other's hands because of their greed and presumably suffer the fate of the Second Death, the outcome in Rowling's series is not nearly so neat because after all her intent is not Christian exemplum, although we see in her scheme a theological denouement. Voldemort, like the first two Peverell brothers and the three revelers in the Chaucerian source, having rashly sought to "sleen Deeth" and thus having embraced despair over hope, "occupies a hell of his own making."³⁹ Over and against this is the hope represented by Harry and his embrace first of death through his willingness to sacrifice for others, and then of life as represented by his Christ-like resurrection, his circle of friends and family, and the final scene of the book which celebrates marriage and child-bearing.⁴⁰ As is illustrated in Chaucer's Pardoner's Tale, in the tale of "The Three Brothers," and in the spiritual narratives that give rise to them, truly "there are things much worse than death."

³⁹ Johnston, "Harry Potter, Eucatastrophe," 79.

⁴⁰ Taliaferro develops this idea more fully in his article.

Intention or Accident? Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain**

Phillip Lindley

Introduction

Charles Alfred Stothard's (d. 1821) *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* contains some of the finest etchings of medieval tomb-effigies ever published. The superb quality of the prints, and the fidelity with which they were thought to represent the medieval effigies Stothard depicted, guaranteed the book's reputation throughout the nineteenth century.

In the last forty years, several major studies have stressed the book's great cultural significance in the early phases of the Gothic Revival. They have also highlighted its visual distinctiveness. Stothard's etchings have always

* For access to drawings, manuscripts, prints, or books in their care, I am grateful to Elisabeth Fairman, Senior Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts, and to John Monahan, Senior Curatorial Assistant, of the Yale Center for British Art; the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; and the staffs of the Prints and Drawings Department of the British Museum; the Manuscripts Room of the British Library; the Rare Books Room of the University Library, Cambridge; the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London; and to Richard Knowles, who has generously discussed Stothard's work with me. Professors Brendan Cassidy, Jean Michel Massing, and Rosemary Sweet, and Drs John Blatchly, Lisa Ford, Meredith McNeill Hale, Jackie Hall, and Matthew Potter have kindly read and commented on earlier drafts of this chapter, and I have also benefited from discussions with Professors Stephen Bann and Elizabeth Prettejohn, when I presented some of this material in a lecture at Bristol in 2011, and from the comments of Professoressa Cinzia Sicca-Bursill-Hall when I lectured on Stothard to the doctoral program in History of Art at the University of Pisa in 2012. I remain, of course, responsible for any errors. I am grateful to the Science and Heritage Program (funded by the UK Arts & Humanities Research Council and Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council) for the grant which made completion of this research possible.

been renowned for their intense artistic focus on the effigies alone. This concentration contrasts with the approach of most earlier British antiquarian draughtsmen, who usually showed the whole monument – that is to say the effigy within its architectural setting – even if they also included separate plates of the effigy by itself. Stothard's very different artistic emphasis has been attributed to his training in the Royal Academy Schools. However, it has also, more contentiously, been argued that he deliberately suppressed any visual evidence of the architectural contexts – the tomb-chests, canopies, or architectural settings – in which the effigies belonged. The reason he did this, it is alleged, is because he felt uneasy, as a nationalistic Protestant Englishman, about showing the medieval Roman Catholic contexts in which the effigies belonged. So, he edited them out.

This article forensically investigates why the effigies' original architectural environments should have been omitted from Stothard's prints. The results of this investigation are very surprising. Its most important revelation is that the almost total absence of medieval monumental architecture from the book was not Stothard's intention. On the contrary, it is shown to have been an entirely unintended and unfortunate consequence of the artist's tragically early death. By examining the history of the book archaeologically, and by tracing Stothard's evolving plans for the *Monumental Effigies*, we can prove that he intended the book to look very different from the volume that was actually published, eleven years after his death.

The fortuna critica of the Monumental Effigies

The superb etchings of medieval effigial sculpture and brasses, gathered together in Charles Stothard's posthumously published book of 1832, *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, have always been widely acclaimed (Figs 1–3).¹ In the nineteenth century, the prints were praised for their beauty and elegance, but above all for the scrupulous fidelity with which they were thought to depict their subjects. The artist's attention to details of costume, jewelry, and armor, which were sometimes also shown on a larger scale on the prints, seemed to endorse Stothard's own claims to accuracy. Such details

¹ C. A. Stothard, *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* (London: Stothard and McCreery, 1832 [hereafter *ME*]). The date of publication is frequently but erroneously ascribed to 1817, the date on the first title page (this was issued to subscribers in the eighth number of the *ME*, which, as discussed below, was published as a series of separate individual numbers, to be bound together as a book only when the last one had been issued). The second title page of 1832 marks the publication of the completed book. For the background, see P. Lindley, "The Artistic Practice, Protracted Publication and Posthumous Completion of Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*," *Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012): 385–426.



Figure 1. C. A. Stothard, *The Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, etching of effigy of Sir Humphry Littlebury, Holbeach, bird's eye view and details at larger scale.

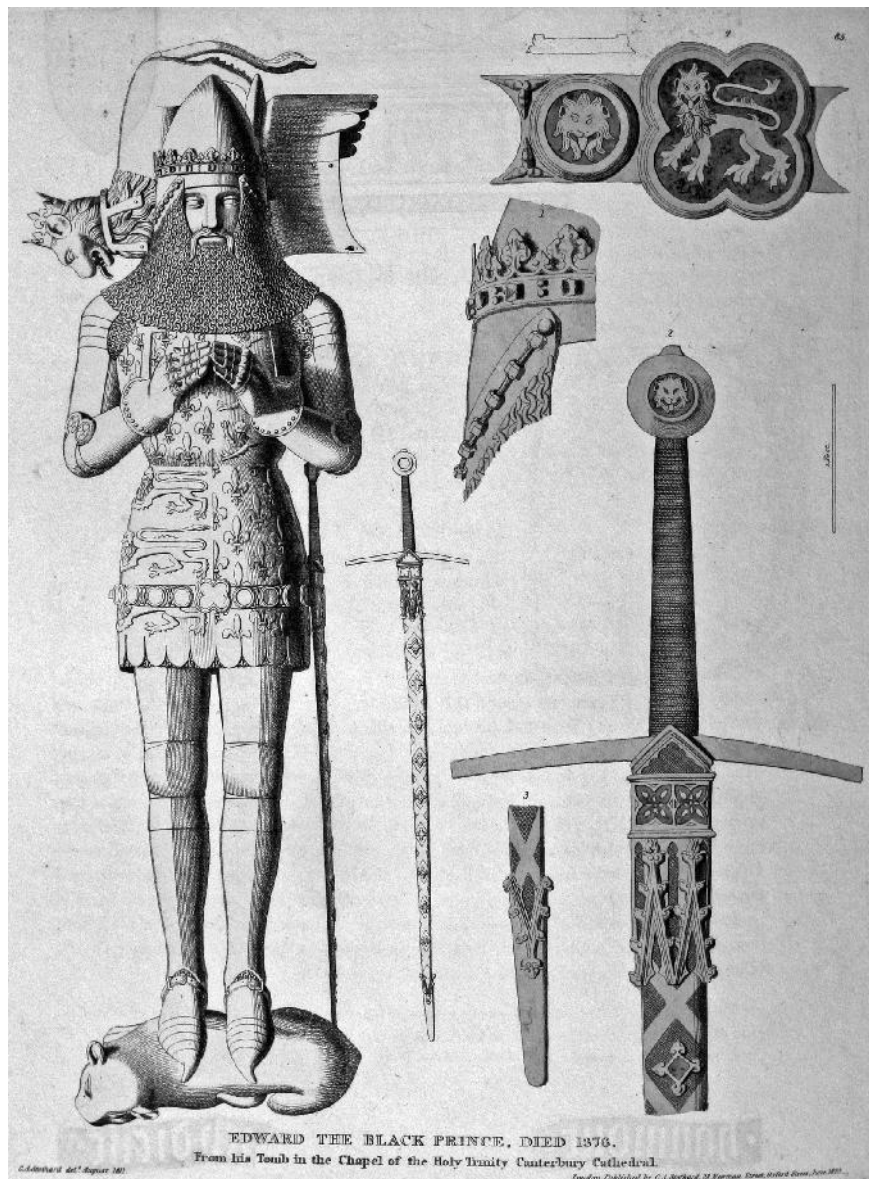


Figure 2. Stothard, etching, bird's eye view, effigy of the Black Prince, Canterbury Cathedral, and details; those at a larger scale are hand-painted.



Figure 3. Stothard, etching of effigy of King John, Worcester Cathedral, bird's eye view, hand-painted detail on left and reconstruction of original medieval polychromy on right.



Figure 4. Stothard, etching, bird's eye view of effigy of Abbot William de Colchester, Westminster Abbey, with original polychromy shown, hand-painted.

were, on occasion, hand-painted to reproduce the medieval polychromy. Sometimes, Stothard also reconstructed the effigies' entire painted surfaces in his prints (usually, but not always, on a small scale) (Figs 3–5), to show their original visual impact.²

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, interest in the book began to wane. This was partly because the Gothic Revival itself lost momentum, but partly also because photography was perceived to offer a level of visual objectivity superior to any draughtsman's work. The first book on British medieval monuments to be systematically illustrated with high-quality photographs, Octavius Morgan's *Some Account of Ancient Monuments in the Priory Church, Abergavenny*, was published in 1872.³ Historians of what is now considered a rather esoteric area of British medieval art nevertheless continued to employ Stothard's etchings as illustrations when discussing the effigies he represented. This is remarkable testimony to the continuing belief that they are reliable visual records.⁴ Richard Knowles, in an important paper on Stothard's drawings of French monuments, forcefully maintained that the artist represented medieval effigial sculpture with "great, unalloyed accuracy," and it is certainly the case that Stothard's precise and elegant etchings advanced beyond the printed work of artists even of the stature of John Carter (1748–1817), one of Stothard's predecessors as draughtsman to the Society of Antiquaries of London.⁵ Stothard himself explicitly claimed that

² A second edition of the *ME* was published as late as 1876, in which its textual components were greatly expanded and improved by John Hewitt. However, the hand-painted coloring of some of the etchings (generally confined to details, but sometimes used more extensively), which contributes so much to the book's opulence and to the impression that the prints authentically record medieval polychromy, was much inferior to that of the first edition. Stothard's widow commented in 1881 that "since I [...] parted from the copyright, to Mr [H. G] Bohn, the colouring has not been satisfactory" (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge [cited hereafter as CCC], MS 609, fol. 76r).

³ O. Morgan, *Some Account of Ancient Monuments in the Priory Church, Abergavenny* (Newport: Monmouthshire and Caerleon Antiquarian Association, 1872). This contains 13 photographic illustrations, each individually mounted onto pages at the back.

⁴ E.g., many plates in M. Duffy, *Royal Tombs of Medieval England* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003). S. Badham analyzes one of Stothard's watercolors in *Making History: Antiquaries in Britain 1707–2007*, ed. D. Gaimster, B. Nurse, and J. Steele et al. (London: Harry N. Abrams, 2007), 139.

⁵ R. Knowles, "French excursions: Charles Alfred Stothard and the Monumental Effigies of France," *Church Monuments* 13 (1998): 45–69. For Carter, see J. M. Crook, *John Carter and the Mind of the Gothic Revival* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London, Occasional Papers, volume 17, 1995), his entry on Carter in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and B. Nurse and J. Mordaunt Crook, "John Carter FSA (1748–1817): 'The Ingenious and Very Accurate Draughtsman,'" *Antiquaries Journal* 91 (2011): 211–52. For the accuracy of Carter's drawings, see P. Lindley, *Tomb Destruction and Scholarship: Medieval Monuments in Early Modern England* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 102, 170–71, 180–81, 207–8,



Figure 5. Stothard, etching, bird's eye view of the effigies of John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk and Duchess Elizabeth, with medieval painting shown and hand-painted details at larger scale.

his prints' accuracy could be relied upon in a way that those in Richard Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* (1786–99) – the great precedent for his own enterprise – could not.⁶

and 213 and idem., "Two Fourteenth-Century Tomb Monuments at Abergavenny and the Mournful End of the Hastings Earls of Pembroke," in *Cardiff, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions*, ed. J. R. Kenyon and D. M. Williams (Leeds: Maney, 2006), 136–60.

⁶ "The delineating part is so extremely incorrect and full of errors," he wrote, "that at a future period, when the originals no longer exist, it will be impossible to form any correct idea of what they really were" (see Mrs C. Stothard [Bray, A. E.], *Memoirs, including original Journals, Letters, Papers, and Antiquarian Tracts, of the late Charles Alfred Stothard, F.S.A., Author of the Monumental Effigies of Great Britain* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1823), 29 and *ME*, 5. For Gough, who employed Carter as one of his draughtsmen, see S. Badham, "Richard Gough and the Flowering of Romantic Antiquarianism," *Church Monuments* 2 (1987): 32–43; Badham states (38), "although the illustrations he used were a great improvement on those that had gone before, few do not seem crude in comparison with the work of Stothard."

In the late twentieth century a resurgent interest in the *Monumental Effigies* emphasized its cultural significance as a key work of early nineteenth-century historicism.⁷ The process of rehabilitation started with Sir Roy Strong's deliberately provocative 1978 book, *And when did you last see your father? The Victorian Painter and British History*.⁸ Strong's primary objective was to vindicate the richness and significance of Victorian History painting, at a time when its subject matter, aesthetics, and ideological values were generally regarded with disdain or even disgust. Sir Roy maintained that scholars' lack of attention to Victorian history paintings and to their role in the construction of national identity had seriously distorted modern evaluations of nineteenth-century British art. Strong demonstrated that the ability to depict medieval, Tudor, and Stuart subject matter with historical accuracy became a necessity for painters, because the Victorians tended to equate period accuracy with moral truthfulness. The preface to Frederick Fairholt's *Costume in England: A History of Dress from the Earliest Period until the Close of the Eighteenth Century* perfectly exemplifies his point. Fairholt maintained that "a knowledge of costume is in some degree inseparable from a right knowledge of history." He added:

A conviction of the necessity and value of "truth" in this particular has been the slow growth of the last half-century. [...] As no historian could venture to give wrong dates designedly, so no painter should falsify history by delineating the characters on his canvas in habits not known until many years after their death, or holding implements that were not at the time invented. Whatever talent may be displayed in the drawing, grouping and colouring of such pictures they are but "painted lies"; and cannot be excused any more than the history that falsifies facts and dates would be.⁹

Among the visual resources available to the painter who wished to avoid such "lies" were "the monumental effigies of England [which] at once illustrate the history of art and social life, boldly delineating the great departed [and] by their truthfulness of detail, aid us in understanding much that else would

⁷ This would have gratified Stothard, who had always hoped that his work would attain public recognition: see Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 172.

⁸ R. Strong, *And when did you last see your father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978). The book originated in Strong's Franklin Jasper Walls Lectures, delivered in 1974 in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York.

⁹ F. W. Fairholt, *Costume in England: A History of Dress from the Earliest Period until the close of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1860, 2nd ed.), iii–iv. The first edition was published in 1846.

be obscure.”¹⁰ Fairholt explicitly praised “that excellent artist and judicious antiquary, the late C. A. Stothard, for the conception and execution of his beautiful work, the *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, which, for the first time, did full justice to these subjects.” It was precisely because of its pre-eminent status in the nineteenth century as a visual source for medieval costume and armor that Stothard’s *Monumental Effigies* occupied an important place in Strong’s narrative. In charting the development of increasingly faithful depictions of the dress of the past, Sir Roy maintained that later popularizers frequently supplied history painters with visual models that were directly taken from Stothard’s etchings. The work of previous antiquarian draughtsmen such as Jacob Schnebbelie (1760–92) had, of course, also furnished designs for earlier generations of history painters: Sir Joshua Reynolds, as Matthew Reeves noted, wished to purchase a copy of Richard Gough’s *Sepulchral Monuments* in 1789 precisely because he “thought it a great and very useful work particularly for the artists who studied or painted British Historical pictures.”¹¹

Stephen Bann’s *The Clothing of Clio* offered a radically different approach to the *Monumental Effigies*. Bann investigated the visual presentation of history and the roles played by a wide range of visual materials in recreating that past.¹² He related apparently disparate forms of representation, repositioning them within his broader account of cultural change and the development of a novel “historical-mindedness.” By using the *Monumental Effigies* as “a test case of the capacity of the image to stimulate the rediscovery of the past,” Bann endowed the book with a deeper cultural significance, as an heuristic device with which to gauge the development of early nineteenth-century historicism.¹³ The *Monumental Effigies*, for Bann, oscillated “between a tradi-

¹⁰ Fairholt, *Costume*, 78. For Fairholt, see also *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), entry *s.n.* by Joanna Selborne. His overblown rhetoric and rather obsessive insistence on the absolute necessity of accurate historicity in the popular paintings of British medieval history (and also in plays set in the Middle Ages), may now seem suffocatingly pedantic. One is reminded of Larry Wrangel’s aphorism in Saul Bellow’s short story, “What kind of day did you have?”: “The revolution that draws its poetry from the past is condemned to end in depression and dullness.”

¹¹ M. Reeves, “Jacob Schnebbelie, Draughtsman to the Society of Antiquaries (1760–92), and the Politics of Preservation in Late Eighteenth-Century England,” *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* 51 (2007): 69–86 (73). See also the entry in the *ODNB* by F. M. O’Donoghue, rev. Rosie Dias.

¹² S. Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the representation of history in nineteenth-century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, repr. 2011), 2.

¹³ In keeping with his focus upon “characteristic types of historical discourse and representation,” rather than individual figures or their achievements, Bann deployed Stothard’s work as a gauge of shifting attitudes to historicity between what he terms metonymic and metaphoric forms of illustration. Bann, *Clio*, 54.

tional scientific objective – that of recording, assembling and detailing for the sake of ‘knowledge’ – and a passionate commitment whose aim cannot so easily be expressed – that of rehabilitating the ‘object’ and thus resurrecting the past.”¹⁴ For Bann, the relationship between the book’s etched images and its textual components was critically important because this “ambiguity” was “also mirrored in the texts which accompany the visual material.”¹⁵ Stothard’s series of effigies could “be rescued from Time only by being inserted in a discourse which mimes the process of chronological sequence. They can be rescued from Time only by narration.”¹⁶ Interestingly, Bann contradicted previous commentators’ endorsement of Stothard’s etchings as paradigms of mimetic accuracy. Instead, he viewed them as “schematic, non-naturalistic” representations, which had to be dramatized through the accompanying narratives, which disciplined and sequenced their subjects as well as revivifying and resurrecting them.¹⁷

The dynamic interrelationship between printed series of images and their accompanying texts in this period was the chief subject of Sam Smiles’s book *Eye Witness: Artists & Visual Documentation in Britain 1770–1830*.¹⁸ Smiles maintained that printed images now posed a challenge to texts as a cognitive tool. Printed illustrations in accumulative series were, he convincingly argued, promoted as a means of advancing learning at the same time as the contents of the disorganized and heterogeneous displays associated with private cabinets of curiosities were themselves starting to be taxonomically structured into periods and schools in state museums and galleries. *Series* of prints were presented in arrangements and sequences deliberately designed to structure understanding. The *Monumental Effigies* is cited by Smiles as an example of the newly systematized organization of prints combined with explanatory texts, designed to present visual data accurately.¹⁹ It can be seen that Smiles’s focus on series of printed images is rather different from Bann’s, but both scholars helped recuperate the *Monumental Effigies* to a wider cultural significance and employed its analysis as a tool to help explain the larger processes of historical change. Both also focused on the relationship between the etchings and the texts published with them in the book.

For Strong, Bann, and Smiles, Stothard’s *magnum opus* was not their central focus, but an important component of a much larger thesis. By

¹⁴ Bann, *Clio*, 65.

¹⁵ Bann, *Clio*, 64.

¹⁶ Bann, *Clio*, 67.

¹⁷ Bann, *Clio*, 65.

¹⁸ S. Smiles, *Eye Witness: Artists and Visual Documentation in Britain 1770–1830* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

¹⁹ Smiles, *Eye Witness*, 21.

contrast, the *Monumental Effigies* occupies center stage in a stimulating recent essay in *Studies in Medievalism* by Rachel Dressler. She detected an anxious, Francophobic patriotism in the book, production of which was begun when Britain was still at war with France.²⁰ Situating the *Monumental Effigies* in its contemporary political and cultural context, she highlighted its overtly nationalistic agenda; but she also identified a covertly Protestant one.

We have noted that from its publication in 1832, Stothard's book was famous for the way the prints focused on effigies alone, rather than showing the effigies in their architectural environments.²¹ Dressler posed the question why "Stothard choose[s] to extract his effigies from their original sacred contexts and [to] present them as isolated statues," and suggested two reasons. The first was his artistic training. Charles Stothard was admitted as a student of the Royal Academy in January 1807 by Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), Keeper of the Schools, after he had seen one of Charles's drawings: this was a normal route into the RA schools for a student, who would progress from drawing plaster casts after the antique to sketching from life models.²² In addition to his training at the Academy, Charles must have been profoundly influenced by the artistic style and methods of his father, Thomas Stothard RA (1755–1834), the well-known painter and print-designer, and by his father's close friend, the great sculptor John Flaxman RA (1755–1826). Their influences are clear in Charles Stothard's recorded statements. "*Study, judgment, [and] feeling*," were, in his opinion, "the three requisites necessary towards making a successful artist. [...] He thought no person could draw finely, without a course of study from the antique, and that it was the best method to commence with severe subjects for the improvement of outline. [...] In the beginning a strict attention to outline is above all things necessary."²³ This artistic creed may well help explain the sensitive linearity of Stothard's etchings, but it does not account for the absence of architecture from the *Monumental Effigies*. Dressler maintained that Stothard deliberately omitted the architectural contexts of the effigies – their tomb-chests, canopies, or chapels

²⁰ R. Dressler "‘Those effigies which belonged to the English Nation’: Antiquarianism, Nationalism, and Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*," *Studies in Medievalism XIV: Correspondences: Medievalism in Scholarship and the Arts*, ed. Tom Shippey with Martin Arnold (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 143–74.

²¹ For example in the review of the *Monumental Effigies* in the *Gentleman's Magazine* 102/2 (1832): 236, where Stothard's work is contrasted with that of Edward Blore. The review is ascribed to Kempe himself in E. M. de Montluzin's attribution of authorship.

²² Dressler, "Antiquarianism," 158: "Stothard's illustrations treat medieval effigies as if they were ancient statuary [...] removed from any specific setting." S.C. Hutchison, *The History of the Royal Academy 1768–1986* (London: Robert Royce, 1986), 29–30. Fuseli was again Professor of Painting after 1809.

²³ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 12–13.

– for ideological reasons. The artist was, she argued, trying to “secularize” the effigies and brasses by intentionally erasing the connections between the depicted figures and the medieval Catholic Church. “Without visual evidence of their original religious context, these effigies become almost completely secular, leaving room for their more nationalistic associations to emerge. In short, through Stothard’s laconic presentation, the monumental effigies become less Catholic and, therefore, more English.”²⁴ In other words, Stothard deliberately abstracted the effigies he represented from their original architectural context, because this context was that of the medieval Catholic Church. He erased this aspect of the past in order to appropriate the figures “for his own time and place.”²⁵ The artist’s reputation for artistic fidelity must be seriously undermined by the argument that he intentionally omitted architectural elements from his etchings in the interests of “English Protestant religious and ethnic bigotry.”²⁶

This brief survey of modern scholarship on the *Monumental Effigies* has shown that while all scholars are agreed on the great cultural significance of the book, their evaluations of the accuracy or otherwise of Stothard’s prints differ quite dramatically. What has not hitherto been taken into account, however, is whether the book as published actually delivered Stothard’s own intentions. This is in spite of the fact that Richard Knowles, in an admittedly brief comment on the subject, has already indicated that this was not the case.²⁷ We shall show that construction of the *Monumental Effigies* was a tortuously long-drawn-out affair. Our reappraisal of the book’s facture will uncover precisely how Stothard’s views about the depiction of monumental architecture in his prints changed over the years he was at work and will shed new light on the relationship between the book’s prints and its texts.

Nationalism, Protestantism, and Monumental Architecture

It is indisputable that Stothard’s work, like many antiquarian publications of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had nationalistic objectives.²⁸ Britain had been back at war with Napoleonic France ever since the collapse of the Treaty of Amiens (1802), and one consequence of this conflict

²⁴ Dressler, “Antiquarianism,” 159.

²⁵ Dressler, “Antiquarianism,” 158–59: “Stothard claims ownership over these relics of the medieval past and renders them freely available to act as desirable icons for his own time and place” (158).

²⁶ Dressler, “Antiquarianism,” 159.

²⁷ Knowles, “French excursions,” 66. Knowles’s work is not cited by Smiles or Dressler.

²⁸ S. Bending, “Every Man is Naturally an Antiquarian: Francis Grose and polite antiquities,” in *Tracing Architecture: the Aesthetics of Antiquarianism*, ed. D. Arnold and S. Bending (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 100–10 (101).

was a strongly nationalistic mood, in which medieval wars with France were construed as historical precedents for the contemporary struggle.²⁹ Another consequence was a more general turning inwards, to examine British antiquities, particularly medieval art and architecture, now that access to the continent was largely impossible.³⁰

One aspect of Stothard's nationalism is revealed by his claim, in the prospectus for the *Monumental Effigies*, that his illustrations would elucidate "History and Biography, as most of these characters must in the course of this Work be brought in, who have been concerned in the Civil and Military Affairs of England from the earliest times in the reign of Henry the Eighth." The majority of his subjects were military effigies: in effect, he was offering representations of the medieval counterparts to the lavish monumental sculptures that were now being produced to commemorate the heroes of the wars against Napoleonic France. The material past was being enlisted in the service of the present. Westminster Abbey, from which the majority of Stothard's earliest subjects were drawn, had been, until the end of the eighteenth century, the natural location for monuments to men who were termed, in the dedication to John Dart's *Westmonasterium*, "Glorious British Heroes."³¹ The taste for erecting grandiose funerary monuments to military heroes developed rapidly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.³² Previously left largely to private patronage, it was now sponsored by the state. The government voted money from the Exchequer in 1795 for monuments in Westminster Abbey and St Paul's to commemorate those who had died heroically in the wars against France.³³ As Alison Yarrington has shown, state patronage reflected the widespread cultural belief that art could function didactically as a powerful stimulus to patriotism, sacrifice, virtue, and military heroism. Parliament granted £22,585 for six monuments, three in the abbey and three in the cathedral, contracts being signed with the sculptors on 20 December 1798. Margaret Whinney recorded that "between

²⁹ J. M. Frew, "Gothic is English: John Carter and the Revival of Gothic as England's National Style," *Art Bulletin* 64 (1982): 315–19.

³⁰ J. M. Frew, "An Aspect of the Early Gothic Revival: the Transformation of Medievalist Research, 1770–1800," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 174–85. Stothard's view of medieval sculpture would change after he was able to visit France, following the decisive victory of Waterloo, and examine French imagery.

³¹ J. Dart, *Westmonasterium: Or the History and Antiquities of the Abbey Church of St Peters Westminster* (London: James Cole, Joseph Smith, Tho. Bowles, Jer. Batley, Tho. Taylor, John Bowles & Andrew Johnstone, 1723/24), I, dedication to George Augustus, Prince of Wales.

³² A. Yarrington, *The Commemoration of the Hero 1800–1864: Monuments to the British Victors of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York and London: Garland, 1988).

³³ Yarrington, *Hero*, viii–ix.

1802 and 1812 at least £40,000 of public money," was "voted by Parliament for national monuments to soldiers, sailors and statesmen and very large sums had also been spent by the Corporation of London and by subscriptions raised in other cities."³⁴ Little wonder that the painter Benjamin Robert Haydon wrote so enviously in 1812: "In no country has sculpture been so favoured, fed and pampered as in this country."³⁵ State patronage of monuments was a major reason for the development of a school of British sculpture. The first professorship of sculpture was established in the Royal Academy schools in 1810. John Flaxman pointed out in his inaugural lecture to the Academy students that "the appointment of a Professorship in [Sculpture] was not required until the increasing taste of the country had given great popularity to the art itself, and native achievements had called on the powers of native sculpture to celebrate British heroes and patriots."³⁶ This explicit connection between monumental sculpture, nationalism, and military achievement was echoed when, the next year, from June 1811, Charles Stothard began to publish his etchings of medieval monumental effigies to subscribers, issuing a dozen etchings at a time, starting with monuments in Westminster Abbey (Fig. 6) and military effigies in the Temple Church.³⁷

If Stothard's nationalism cannot be doubted, his own comments make it clear that his Christianity was that of a reasonably conventional member of the Church of England of the period. Writing to his father in 1813, for example, he poked slightly dismissive fun at a dissenting preacher he had heard in Leamington Spa:

I was greeted on my entrance to the place, at dusk, by hearing the thundering denunciations of a methodist preacher, who it seems had possessed himself of an empty sale-room, in order to counteract if possible the works of Satan: when I went into the room, I found his auditory chiefly to consist of gentlemen's servants.³⁸

³⁴ M. Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530 to 1830* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1964), 197.

³⁵ *Autobiography of B. R. Haydon*, ed. T. Taylor and with introduction by A. Huxley (London: Peter Davies, 1926), I, 149, cited by Whinney, *Sculpture*, 197.

³⁶ J. Flaxman, *Lectures on Sculpture* (London: John Murray, 1829), 1–2. For Charles's father, see S. M. Bennett, *Thomas Stothard: The Mechanisms of Art Patronage in England circa 1800* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988).

³⁷ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 36, for June 1811. I suspect it may only have appeared at the beginning of July (see Stothard's correspondence on 24 June and 18 July 1811, in British Library MS, Additional 36503, fols 17r and 36r). This serial mode of book production was common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For the Temple Church effigies, see now *The Temple Church in London: History, Architecture, Art*, ed. R. Griffith-Jones and D. Park (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010).

³⁸ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 105.



Figure 6. Stothard, etching, bird's eye view, William of Valence's effigy, Westminster Abbey, second version, with details, two of which are hand-colored.

His views on Roman Catholicism, which he personally experienced in France on his three journeys in 1816, 1817, and 1818, are expressed in some of his letters – in 1817, for example, he deplored the Festival of Notre Dame at Chartres as a noisy “farce” – and in his comments as reported by his wife, [Anna] Eliza (1790–1883).³⁹ Her published letters to her mother, composed during her 1818 tour with her husband in France, must have received his tacit endorsement, and it is likely that he shared her contemptuous view of Catholicism, even if he might not have put his views quite so bluntly:⁴⁰

The rational mind cannot view without astonishment and regret, so large a portion of the Christian world, absurdly imagining that the worship of the Deity can in any manner consist in dressing up frightful dolls, ringing little bells, parading up and down a church, illuminating and extinguishing wax candles, and a thousand other childish ceremonies.⁴¹

She, certainly, was strongly hostile to the practices and beliefs of French Roman Catholics and spent a good deal of time arguing with them, even if she came to respect some individual Catholics. The question, however, arises whether the visual concentration on effigial sculpture alone, now so remarkable, and remarked upon, a feature of the *Monumental Effigies*, was really due to Stothard's deliberate editing out of their architectural environments because they provided evidence of the effigies' medieval Catholic context.⁴² It would, *prima facie*, be rather surprising, because eighteenth- and nineteenth-century members of the Church of England felt (as many, I think, still do) that their church was both “Catholic and Reformed,” that is to say, that it retained continuity with the past, purified by Reformation. Moreover, had Stothard really wished to edit out medieval Catholicism altogether, he would surely have omitted effigies of priests: there are not many of them in the *Monumental Effigies*, because he was more interested in military figures and the development of armor, but, still, there are half a dozen (Fig. 4).

It is true that when the *Monumental Effigies* was finally completed, more than a decade after Stothard's death, the plates concentrated almost exclu-

³⁹ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 240; Dressler, 160.

⁴⁰ E.g., Mrs C. Stothard, *Letters Written during a Tour through Normandy, Brittany and other Parts of France, in 1818* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1820), 5, for example, or her long dispute with nuns (211–12) at Ploermel.

⁴¹ Stothard, *Letters*, 36.

⁴² Compare Dressler's view with that of Bann, who argues (64): “the engraved plates deliberately accentuate the element of reduction and fragmentation.”

sively on sculpted (or brass) effigies.⁴³ However, in the next part of this article, I shall show that the absence of the tomb-chests and canopies on and under which they were frequently housed was entirely contrary to Stothard's expressed intentions. I shall argue that the *Monumental Effigies* when published as a book in 1832 was very severely compromised by the way in which it had been completed after Stothard's fatal accident on 28 May 1821, when he fell from a ladder while tracing stained glass at Bere Ferrers church in Devon.⁴⁴ It is surprising, given the assumptions that have been made about the *Monumental Effigies*, that only Richard Knowles has paid attention to the circumstances surrounding the book's much delayed publication, because it was these circumstances that decisively changed the relationships between the book's etchings and its textual components and caused the almost complete omission of the effigies' architectural contexts.⁴⁵

Text, Image, and Architectonic Structure

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed sophisticated debates about the importance of visual cognition and the concomitant development of pragmatic new approaches to the interplay of texts and images in illustrated books.⁴⁶ Such interrelationships could be purely conceptual, but they could also, of course, affect the physical layout of books, in terms of the relative positioning and weighting assigned to letter-press and prints. During the long gestation and production of the *Monumental Effigies*, Stothard carefully contemplated the relationships between his etchings of effigies and his projected texts. His thoughts on this subject were intimately and inextricably entwined with his ideas about the visual presentation of the architectural environments of the monumental sculpture he depicted. During his decade-long work on the *Monumental Effigies*, Stothard radically revised his initial plans. The artist's brilliant resolution of problems with which he had grappled for years would have resulted in a dynamic interrelationship of texts and etchings. His intentions can be still be discovered within the book as it was finally published, even though his plans were abandoned by his widow,

⁴³ "Weepers" are the subjects of three etchings (from Kerdeston, and Warwick [where the two etchings are, as we shall see, by C. J. Smith]), but even in these exceptions the architecture of the tomb-chests is effectively suppressed. Of the larger architectural context, only the sculpted detail of one side of the tomb-recess at Shurland, and the painted hunting scene in the mural recess behind the Ingham effigy, appear on the plates. The *ME* also included brasses, but the overwhelming concentration was on effigial sculpture.

⁴⁴ R. Knowles, *The Death of Charles Stothard: an eyewitness account* (Wakefield: Box Tree Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ Knowles, "French excursions," 61–66.

⁴⁶ Smiles, *Eye Witness*, 21–22.

Anna Eliza, and his close friend and brother-in-law, Alfred John Kempe (c. 1785–1846).

Analysis of a hitherto unidentified and unpublished pencil drawing by Stothard in the British Museum Prints and Drawings Collection (British Museum 1883, 0714.749) offers a key to our inquiry (Fig. 7). It depicts the east end of the south side of the tomb monument of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (1382–1439), in St Mary's Church, Warwick, drawn to scale.⁴⁷ The drawing can be dated by reference to correspondence printed in the *Memoirs* of her late husband, which Eliza started to compile almost immediately after Stothard's death.⁴⁸ The first relevant letter was written by the artist to his father, Thomas, on Tuesday, 31 August 1813. Charles was then visiting St Mary's, Warwick, to draw medieval monuments. The magnificent gilt-bronze effigy of the earl (one of only two such effigies still existing in England outside Westminster Abbey) on its Purbeck-marble tomb-chest, decorated with gilt-bronze statuettes of "weepers" and angels, and with enameled escutcheons (Fig. 8), was a revelation to him.⁴⁹ He wrote that the monument:

far exceeded my expectations. In the first place, it has around it fourteen figures, each about a foot and a half high; the draperies of which are exceedingly fine, but the figures are some of them wanting in proportions; the heads being too large: the whole of these I shall draw before I leave this place. The effigy of the Earl resembles very much one I have given in my fourth number, of Robert, Lord Hungerford, but with considerable variations; whenever it is similar, it serves to illustrate that figure. But for the armour of the time, nothing can be conceived more explanatory; not a strap, buckle, or hinge, appears wanting. To

⁴⁷ It is contained in one of three modern folders of Stothard's drawings for, or made in connection with, the *ME*. See P. Lankester: "Charles Stothard's Drawings for the Monumental Effigies of Great Britain," *Church Monuments Society Newsletter* 20/1 (2004): 6–9. They are summarily listed by Laurence Binyon: *Catalogue of Drawings by British Artists and Artists of Foreign Origin Working in Great Britain in the [...] British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1898–1907), IV, 124–38. The drawings were originally mounted "in a sort of books like copy books – just as he [Stothard] left them," according to his widow, writing in 1881 (CCC, MS 609, fol. 76v) and these albums must unfortunately have been dismembered when the drawings came to the British Museum. Many drawings remain fixed to the now separated or cut-up pages.

⁴⁸ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*.

⁴⁹ For the monument's documentation, see P. Lindley, *Gothic to Renaissance* (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), 47–72. The most recent study is R. Marks, "'Entumbid right princely': the Beauchamp Chapel at Warwick and the Politics of Interment," in *Memory and Commemoration in Medieval England*, ed. C. M. Barron and C. Burgess (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2010), 163–84.

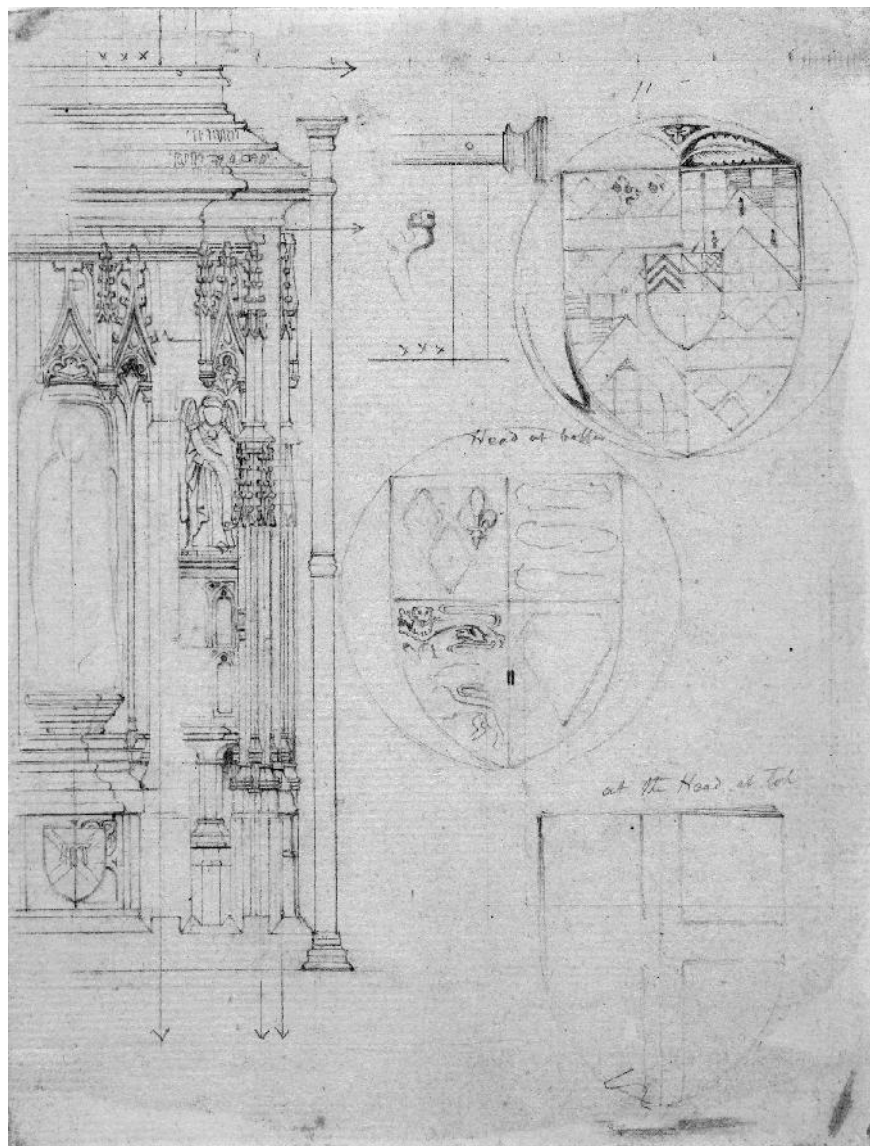


Figure 7. Stothard, drawing, East end of south side of Richard Beauchamp's tomb-chest, St Mary's, Warwick (British Museum, Prints and Drawings, 1883, 0714.749).



Figure 8. Modern photograph, Tomb-chest and effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Beauchamp Chapel, St Mary's, Warwick.

give you the best idea of it would be to say, that it seems a real suit of armour of that aera, in brass; so thinly wrought is the metal in the elbow-pieces and pass-guards which protect the neck. It is to be lamented, that this fine figure is not quite perfect: the dagger and rest are wanting; the holes drilled in the brass, point out their having been in those places in which you would expect to find them.

Stothard goes on to describe his rather disgraceful treatment of the effigy, which resulted, however, in one of a series of superb drawings (BM 1883, 0714.655–660 and 499), later etched for the *Monumental Effigies* (Fig. 9):⁵⁰

On Saturday last, I made a discovery that the figure was loose; and, with considerable difficulty, having raised it an inch or two, found, to my great surprise, that the back was nearly as highly finished as the front. To get leave to turn the figure was a matter of great difficulty; my request having been put by, with its being hazardous, and requiring the assistance of three or four men. This morning, on re-examination, I conceived a mode of executing my purpose. Having locked the doors

⁵⁰ The etchings are plates 121–26, following the 1832 numbering system, of the *ME*.

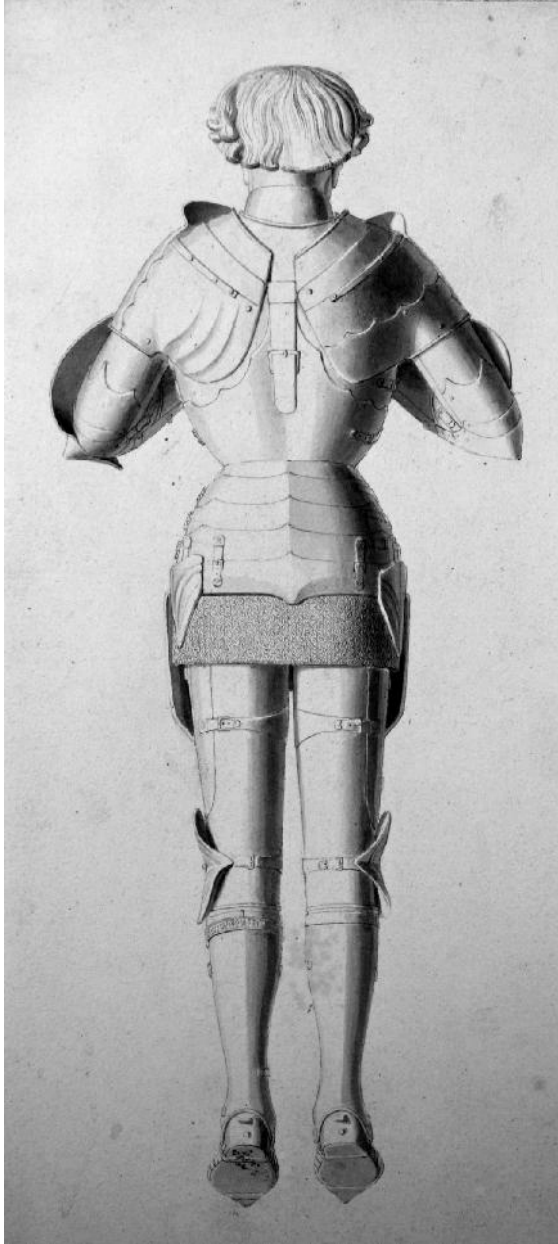


Figure 9. Stothard, drawing, bird's eye view of back of tomb-effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (BM 1883, 0714.658).

for fear of interruptions, with the assistance of a mason, who by good luck was working in the church, I succeeded, in the course of ten minutes, in turning this massy figure completely over, laying him face downwards. The drawing I have begun of this view, although unsightly, will unriddle many things which till to-day I did not understand. I shall have six or seven drawings made from the monument I have now described; and reckon on completing them on Wednesday week, when I shall leave this place.⁵¹

On 14 September 1813, Stothard wrote to Kempe that he had “remained at Warwick nearly three weeks, employed in making drawings from the monument of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, temp. Henry VI. I have executed four views of this figure, back as well as front.”⁵² No other effigy was accorded such a large number of finished drawings as Stothard devoted to the earl’s.⁵³ What gives all Stothard’s representations of medieval effigies their peculiar aesthetic potency and unexpected modernity is the way in which the figures often appear to float in an entirely abstracted space, as if they were illustrations of botanical or lepidopterological specimens.⁵⁴ But none of the other prints rivals the disconcerting and unprecedented view of the back of Beauchamp’s effigy. In addition to his four drawings of this figure, three of which he etched himself (Fig. 10), he made two drawings showing the monument’s “weepers” (these were etched, after his death, with one profile of the effigy, by Charles John Smith [1803–38]); the drawing of the tomb-chest mentioned above; and another, highly schematic, drawing of the whole monument, establishing the proportional relations of the effigy, hearse, and tomb-chest (British Museum, 1883, 0714.733). The newly identified drawing of the Beauchamp monument’s tomb-chest indicates that the scaled precision of Stothard’s delineation of the architectural details of the tomb-chest was as accurate as his drawings of effigies. Some explanation why this architectural aspect of Stothard’s work was largely absent from the *Monumental Effigies* as published is clearly required.

Stothard initially planned the book to comprise a series of a dozen individual “numbers,” one to be issued to subscribers every four months. Each

⁵¹ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 102–3. Stothard told his friend and mentor the antiquary Thomas Kerrich (1748–1828) that he “had leave of the Mayor of Warwick” to make the view: CCC, MS 608, fol. 170v.

⁵² Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 112.

⁵³ Perhaps the only comparable instance of such concentration is his drawings of the Black Prince’s effigy in Canterbury Cathedral, the only other English medieval gilt-bronze effigy existing outside Westminster Abbey.

⁵⁴ See the remarks in the review of the *ME* in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* 102/2 (1832): 233–36.

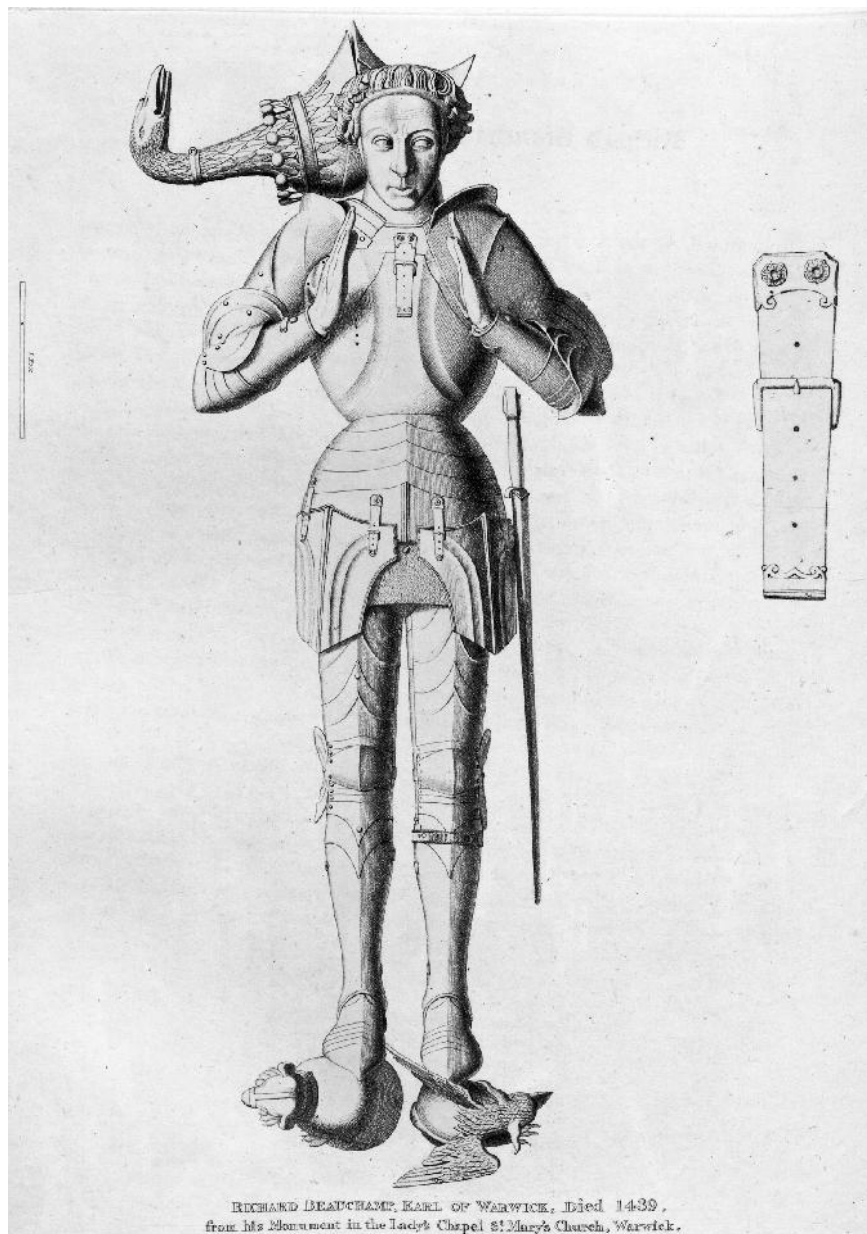


Figure 10. Stothard, etching, bird's eye view of tomb-effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick.

number would contain twelve etchings, starting with the first dozen plates issued in 1811.⁵⁵ The entire textual component of the projected book would be issued only with the twelfth and final number. This letter-press would comprise a general introduction to the whole subject of the book and separate texts to accompany each effigy he had depicted; the commentaries would, Stothard said, “give an account of the Person to whose Memory the Monument was erected, remarks on the Costume wherever they may be made with certainty, and a description of the Monument as to its state of Preservation, situation, Architecture &c.”⁵⁶ The etchings were not issued in the chronological order of the three-dimensional effigy or two-dimensional brass depicted. They could not be, because Stothard only had a vague idea which effigies he would include at the outset of work. Subscribers had to trust to his judgment and to the results of his journeys through England to see prospective subjects for himself.⁵⁷ Charles planned that when all the components had been published, the individual etchings would be arranged in chronological order by the bookbinder, who would also collate the textual materials with them, following instructions Stothard would provide.

By the time of his death in 1821, Stothard had issued nine numbers and had etched nine plates for the tenth: the remaining three prints for this number were subsequently etched from his drawings by his younger brother Robert (fl. 1821–57), who provided two (Fig. 11), and by Edward Blore (1787–1879). The process of completing the book, however, dragged on for eleven years after Stothard's death: the eleventh and twelfth numbers were etched from his drawings by Bartholomew Howlett (1767–1827) (Fig. 12) and C. J. Smith respectively.⁵⁸ The vast majority of the book's text, as we shall see, was not composed by Stothard at all, but was largely written by Alfred Kempe, and was only issued in 1832, when the book was finally completed. So, by the time that the *Monumental Effigies* was finally completed, those of the seventy or so original subscribers who survived had waited twenty-one years, not the four Stothard had initially promised.

So, to summarize, Stothard had first intended to issue the *Monumental Effigies* in twelve numbers, each containing a dozen etchings, identified

⁵⁵ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 36, for June 1811. I suspect it may only have appeared at the beginning of July (see Stothard's correspondence on 24 June and 18 July 1811, in British Library, MS Additional 36503, fols 17r and 36r).

⁵⁶ This information is printed on the reverse of the folders in which each number was issued.

⁵⁷ Effigies in Wales and Scotland were not included, notwithstanding the book's title. The equation of British with English was quite common in England until nearly the end of the twentieth century.

⁵⁸ For details, see Lindley, “The Artistic Practice.” Bernard Nurse has pointed out to me that Robert Stothard succeeded his brother as draughtsman to the Society of Antiquaries [pers. comm.]. I plan to make Robert the subject of further research.

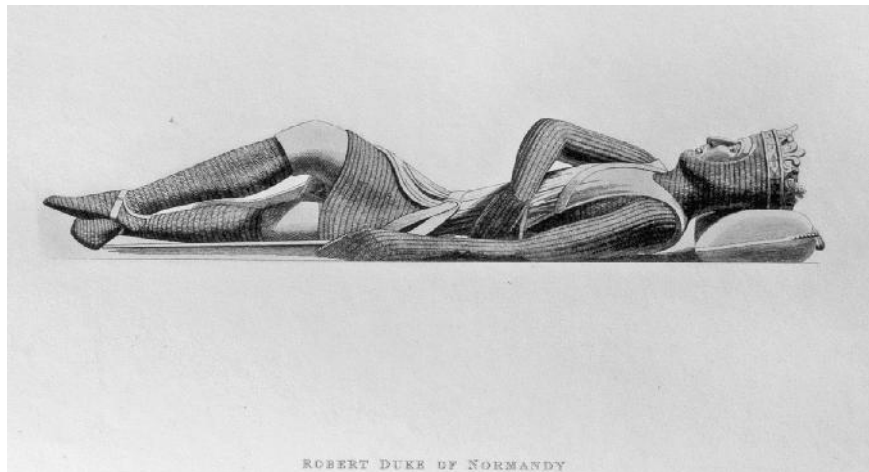


Figure 11. Etching by Robert Stothard after Charles Alfred Stothard's drawing of profile view of Robert Duke of Normandy's effigy, Gloucester Cathedral.

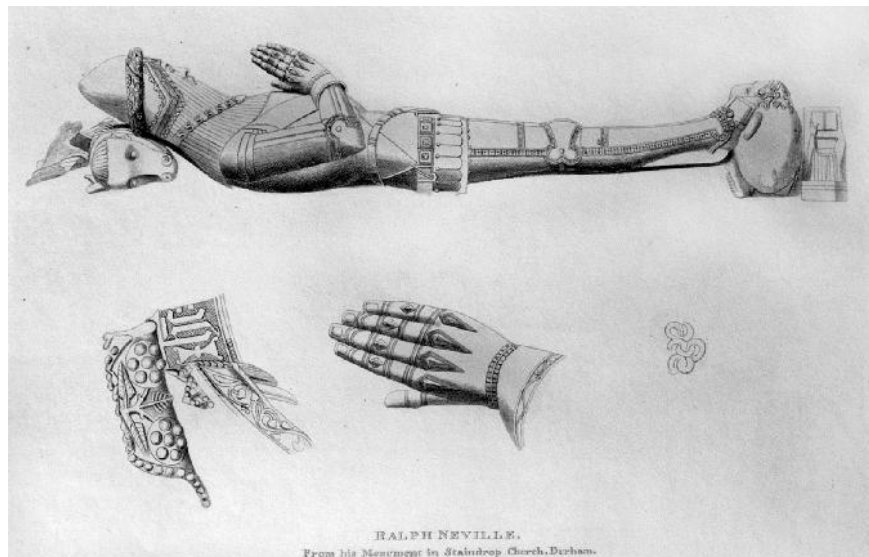


Figure 12. Etching by Benjamin Howlett of Charles Stothard's drawing of profile view of Ralph Neville's effigy, with details on a larger scale.

by captions. The entire text, comprising an introduction and an historical description to accompany each plate, would be supplied only with the final number. Stothard, however, became increasingly dissatisfied with this plan, as he revealed in a letter of 16 February 1815 to his friend the antiquarian publisher William Stevenson:

I am now, and shall be, much engaged with the letter-press; parts of which I purpose publishing early next winter. You know I did not intend doing this at all, till I had finished the plates of my work; for there existed difficulties, that I have now hit on the means of overcoming.

You remember I talked some time since of improvements. [...] As my plan at first stood, I merely intended adding the architecture of the monuments, making plates of the same dimensions as those for the effigies, placing on each two, three, or more subjects, as their size and proportions would admit. On my present plan, I purpose placing the monument described, so as to fall within the upper part of the page. Upon the margin of it (which will be broad,) I shall put such escutcheons, with their bearings, as are to be found on or about the monument above. [...] If I have room for a tail-piece, and want it at the end of the page, I shall reserve that place more particularly for subjects, though not strictly belonging to the effigy or monument treated on, yet such as [...] illustrating what may not be otherwise understood without them. By these means the letter-press will be very rich, and combine with the plates.⁵⁹

The letter proves that Stothard always intended to provide etchings of the effigies' architectural contexts – in recesses, under canopies, and on tomb-chests. At first, he decided to group the architectural etchings together, two or more at a time, on separate plates, but quickly found this plan unsatisfactory. He must have soon realized that the inclusion of architectural etchings at a smaller scale than those of the effigies, and on plates interspersed among them, would have seriously disrupted the book's visual coherence.⁶⁰ By February 1815, he instead planned to place the etchings of monumental architecture (as well as coats of arms and other features) on the relevant text pages. This would have brilliantly unified the book's aesthetic, contextualizing the effigies, and providing an architectonic structure for the whole

⁵⁹ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 170–72.

⁶⁰ The evidence that he soon realized the problem is the fact that Stothard did not issue any such etchings in numbers of the *Monumental Effigies*. The solution, though, took some time to determine.

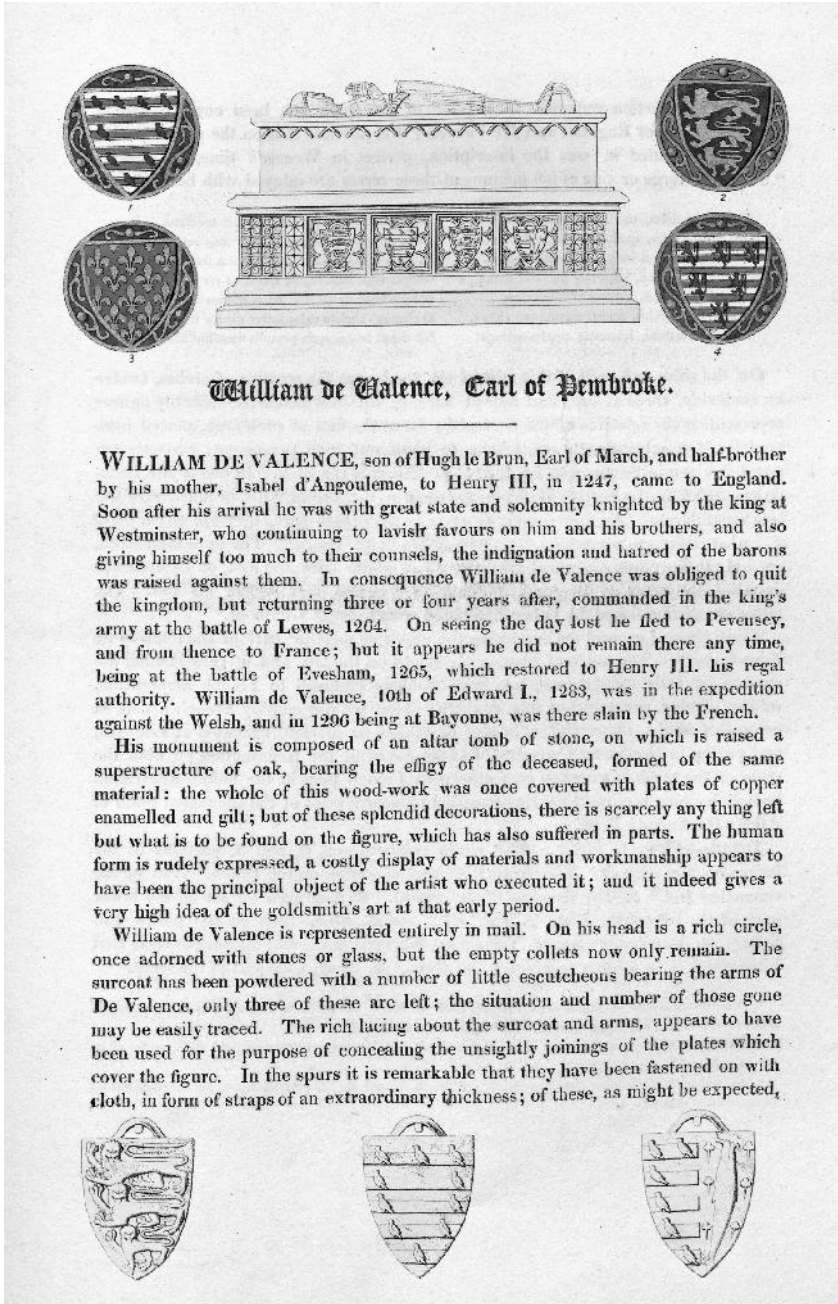


Figure 13. Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, Text page, William de Valence.

work. It took him more than three years to show what this would look like. He wrote again to Stevenson in May 1818, commenting: "In No. 8 you will perceive I have made my first step in authorship, and at the same time you will see the manner in which I have so long talked of arranging my letter-press with architectural and other subjects. If there is anything which occurs to you in the way of improvement, I shall be thankful to you for pointing it out."⁶¹

The sumptuousness of Stothard's mature plans is exemplified by the first text page relating to William de Valence's effigy at Westminster Abbey, which has a vignette of the monument at the head, and hand-painted escutcheons at the sides (Fig. 13).⁶² The illustrations and text relating to the Black Prince's effigy at Canterbury are even more elaborate (Fig. 14).⁶³ Stothard's new plans for the book would, as he intended, have completely transformed the relationship between the plates featuring etchings of the effigies and the accompanying textual pages, for the latter would themselves now frequently have been studded with etched architectural vignettes and coats of arms, linking them visually to the full-page etchings of effigies (Fig. 15).⁶⁴ By the time of Stothard's death in May 1821, he had already included a few such pages among the ten leaves of text that he had edited by then.⁶⁵ He had also prepared many other drawings of tomb-chests and architectural details to accompany other texts. Yet, after his death only the monument of Sir Robert de Shurland was featured as a text vignette or "head-plate" in the manner that Stothard had planned: it was etched by the teen-aged John Swaine

⁶¹ Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 274–75.

⁶² British Museum, 1883, 0714.544, for the drawing.

⁶³ The portraits of Edward III and the Black Prince from British Library, MS Cotton Nero D 6 had earlier been engraved in J. Strutt: *The Regal and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of England: containing, in a compleat series, the representations of all the English monarchs, from Edward the Confessor to Henry the Eighth* (London: Thane, Shropshire & Snelling, 1773).

⁶⁴ The tenth number of the *ME* – the last with which Stothard was himself personally involved – included his text pages on Sir John Peche with a vignette and coats of arms (the central one in color), one page on the knights Templars, one on William Fitz-Alan, and a single remaining page of his text on the Black Prince.

⁶⁵ In subscribers' copies these leaves, which are un-numbered, are easily distinguished by their slightly smaller size than the rest of the text and by their different font. For the list, see "Directions to the Binder." These are the pages on Henry II; (some, but not all, of the text on) the monuments in the Temple church; Queen Berengaria; William de Valence; the Black Prince; Sir Guy Bryan; William Fitz-Alan; and Sir John Peche. The text page for William Fitz-Alan has a space for an architectural etching that was never supplied. This last was issued in number 10, as noted above, and Stothard must have died after the text was printed, but before a vignette could be added. The text page on Henry II has no space for a vignette. The first text page on the monuments in the Temple Church was given vignettes of all the knights' effigies on a smaller scale, etched by Robert Stothard (see *ME*, 112).

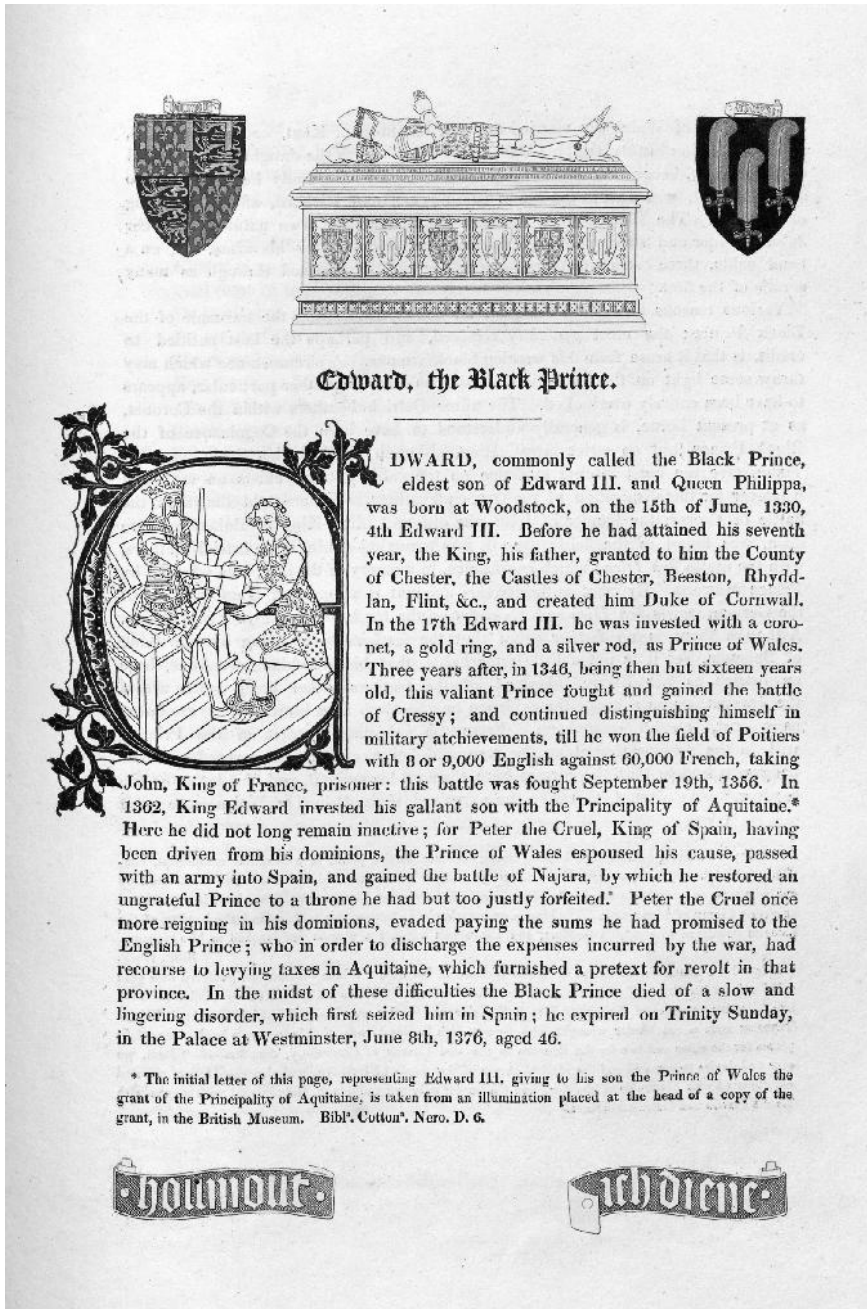


Figure 14. Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, Text page, the Black Prince.

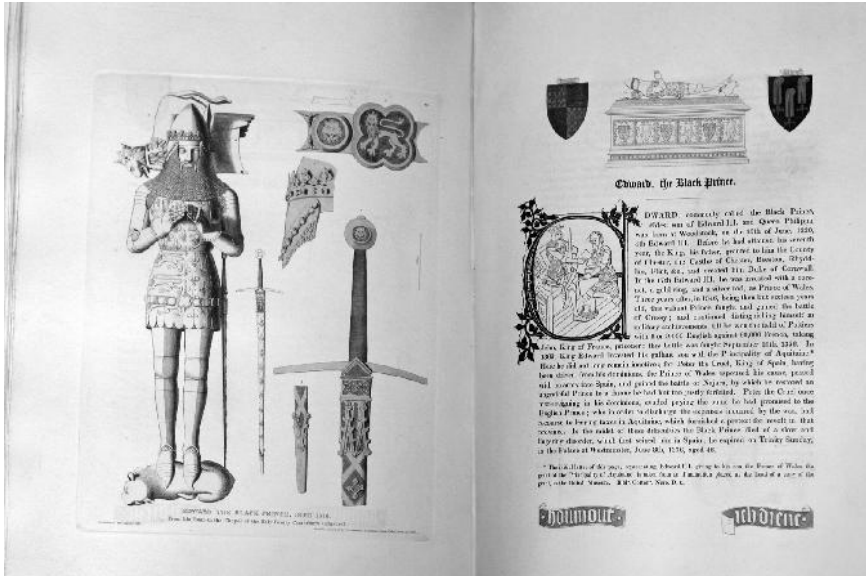


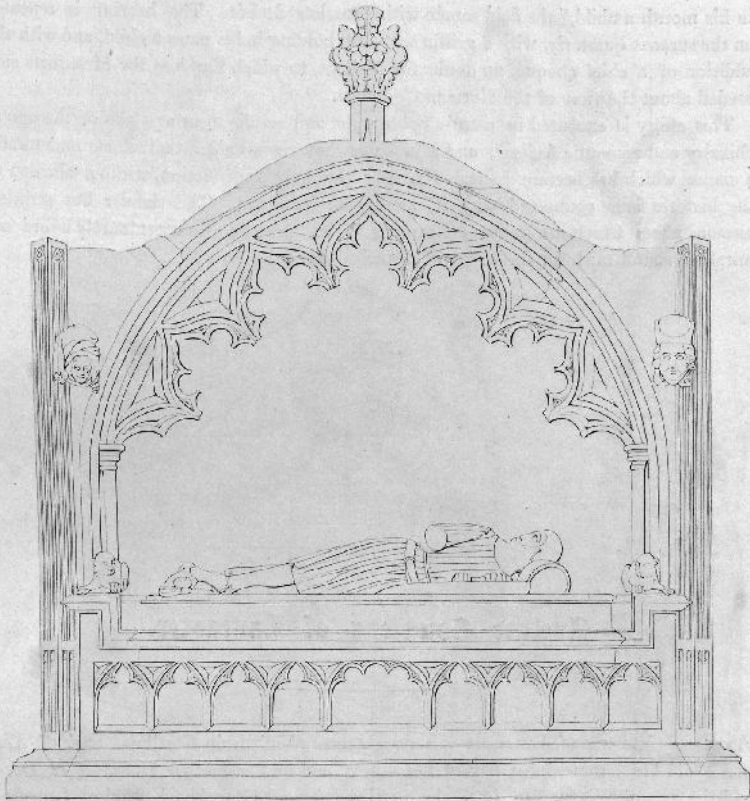
Figure 15. Double-page spread (note the original text page's smaller size), from *Monumental Effigies* (see Figs 2 and 14).

junior (1815?–38) (Fig. 16).⁶⁶ Not one of the other text pages, composed by Alfred Kempe, was accorded such a treatment. Two chief reasons for this omission can be proposed. The first is Stothard's working practice, elucidated in a letter from Eliza to Henry (later Sir Henry) Ellis, then secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London, appealing for his assistance. She wrote that her late husband had:

left sufficient drawings to complete the original plan of the 12th No., with many interesting ms notes etc on the subject of his work, but unfortunately, from a habit of scarcely ever writing upon his drawings, he had not marked whose Effigies they were, or in what Church to be found, and I am totally at a loss to know in what manner I am to gain this very necessary information.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Swaine's obituary is in the *Gentleman's Magazine* NS 5 (1838): 552–53. As noted above, Stothard's brother, Robert, etched two schematic vignettes of the Templars' effigies, after Charles's drawings.

⁶⁷ British Library, MS Additional 38626, fols 100r and v.



Sir Robert de Shurland.

THIS effigy lies on an altar-tomb canopied by a gothic arch and pediment, on the south side of Minster Church, in the Isle of Sheppy. Sir Robert de Shurland, Lord of Shurland, in the parish of Eastchurch, adjoining Minster, was the son of Sir Geoffrey de Shurland, who was Constable of Dover Castle in the time of Henry the Third. Sir Robert was Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, and was made a Knight Banneret by King Edward the First, for his brave deportment at the siege of Carlarverock in 1300, and was probably a benefactor of the monastery of Benedictine Nuns at Minster, in

38

Figure 16. Stothard, *Monumental Effigies*, Text page, Sir Robert de Shurland, architectural vignette etched from Stothard's drawing by John Swaine jr.

As a result of the help she received, Eliza was able to identify sufficient numbers of Stothard's drawings of effigies for it to be possible to complete the work.⁶⁸ Still, though, she could not correctly assign a few effigies and she had very little success in identifying his drawings of tomb-chests and architectural details, as she confessed in the advertisement at the front of the *Monumental Effigies*, when she published the book in 1832:

With respect to the Head-plates for the different Monuments, Mr Stothard, had he survived, would no doubt have added many more to those which he published; but, except in the instance of the tomb of Sir Robert de Shurland, he left behind him no materials available to pursue his intention. His practice in drawing the elevation of Monuments for the Head-plates, was merely to take the just admeasurements, and sketch the mouldings and architectural parts, reserving the putting such materials together for a future opportunity. To these drawings, made only for his *own information*, there were not any memoranda in writing appended, indicating to what tombs they should be applied: consequently (the overwhelming increase of expense out of the question) it became impossible to appropriate them to the purpose for which they were made.⁶⁹

In point of fact, Stothard *had* indicated the subjects in pencil on some of the architectural details among his drawings, but many others were not so helpfully labeled. It is surprising, nonetheless, that so well-known a monument as that of Richard Beauchamp (Fig. 8) was unidentifiable to his wife and friend, especially given that two plates showing the “weepers” from the Beauchamp tomb-chest were to be included in number XII (etched by C. J. Smith).

A powerful disincentive – as is implied by Eliza's comment above – to including such features as vignettes at the head of the accompanying letter-press was the cost of having them etched: additionally, if coats of arms were

⁶⁸ A rare indication of the effigy's location and date it was drawn is the pencil inscription on Stothard's drawing of Bishop Northwold's effigy, which reads: “Hugo de Norwold. S aisle of Ely Cathedral drawn June 1812” (British Museum 1883, 0714.521). From Stothard [Bray], *Memoirs*, 55, we know that he drew this on 26 and 27 June. The drawing was etched by Howlett.

⁶⁹ *ME*, advertisement. Given that the last number features two plates of the Beauchamp tomb weepers and that such figures are very rarely included elsewhere in the *ME*, it seems legitimate to wonder whether the final choice of effigies and details to etch in the last two numbers accurately reflects Stothard's planned choices or was determined by his widow's ability to have the subjects correctly identified from the drawings he had left. Certainly, at least one later commentator (J. G. Nichols) thought Stothard had planned to include other royal effigies from Westminster Abbey.



Figure 17. Drawing by Carter, engraved by Basire, of Richard Beauchamp's monument, St Mary's Warwich, from R. Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments*, London 1796, II, pl. xxxvii.

to be included in color, they would have to be individually, and expensively, hand-painted.⁷⁰ So, it could be suggested, the escalating costs of producing the book using commercial artists to complete her late husband's work might have been a reason for the omission of these extra features. In his determination to establish his reputation through the *Monumental Effigies*, Stothard had not paid enough attention to his finances, and his widow was left seriously short of money.⁷¹ She had to raise the price of each new number to subscribers by 5s, to £1. 5s, and was forced to charge an extra £1. 5s for the more than 120 text pages (including illustrations comprising two etchings, an engraving of Stothard, some woodcuts, and the Shurland tomb vignette),

⁷⁰ Writing to Kerrich on 25 June 1824, when she had just sent him the tenth number, Eliza complained that due to these costs and "the elaborate nature of the coloring, I am sure you will be sorry to learn, my bills have far exceeded what I expect to receive upon the number" (CCC, MS 609, fol. 71v).

⁷¹ As Kempe explained to Kerrich (CCC, MS 609, fols 37r-v): "The heavy debts our lamented friend contracted on account of his "Monumental Effigies" which never paid for Publication at the subscription price [...] I am sorry to say (in confidence) that he has not left all his accounts so clear as we would wish, as far as concerns what is due to him."

which she issued separately as a *thirteenth* and final number in 1832.⁷² Apart from the ten leaves Stothard had issued or readied for the press by the time of his death and an incomplete draft of the introduction (which Kempe incorporated, clearly indicating where Stothard's work began and ended), the whole extensive letter-press was written by her brother. This substantial text comprised the introduction to the whole work and most of the descriptions – of very variable length and content – of the subjects of the individual etchings of effigies.⁷³

It would, though, be wrong as well as uncharitable to suppose that Eliza's motive in producing a visually impoverished redaction of her late husband's work was simply to cut costs. Proof that she (and her brother or friends) really was unable to identify even the famous Beauchamp monument comes from its misidentification on the album page on which it had been mounted: the inscription here reads: "They [*sic*, for these] sketches found amongst Mr Charles Stothard's architectural sketches made by him at an early period of his work and supposed to be parts of the tomb of Henry the 4th and his Queen in Canterbury Cathedral." This error also, perhaps, demonstrates the difficulties contemporaries experienced in identifying monuments on the basis of earlier depictions – such as Wenceslaus Hollar's engraving of the Beauchamp monument for Sir William Dugdale's 1656 *Antiquities of Warwickshire*.⁷⁴ Although it is true that Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments* had included a view of the monument drawn by Carter (engraved by Basire), from which Stothard's sketch could have been identified (Fig. 17), it was precisely this enormous increase in visual fidelity to the depicted objects attained by Stothard's etchings that helped to make the *Monumental Effigies* so widely respected.⁷⁵ It should not diminish Eliza's achievement in bringing the *Monumental Effigies* to final publication in book form that she abandoned this important aspect of her late husband's plans. She was forced to, because she could not identify the subjects of his architectural sketches.

Conclusion

When it was finally completed, the *Monumental Effigies* was a multi-layered palimpsest, an assemblage constructed over more than two decades. The book is much more visually and textually complex than has previously been

⁷² Large paper copies went up from £1. 8s to £1. 15s.

⁷³ For a review, ascribed to Kempe himself in E. M. de Montluzin's attribution of authorship, see the *Gentleman's Magazine* 102/2 (1832): 233–36.

⁷⁴ W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London: T. Warren, 1656), 328.

⁷⁵ R. Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments, in Great Britain* (London: Nichols, 1796), II, pl. xxxvii. For the larger context, see Smiles, *Eye Witness*, chapter 3.

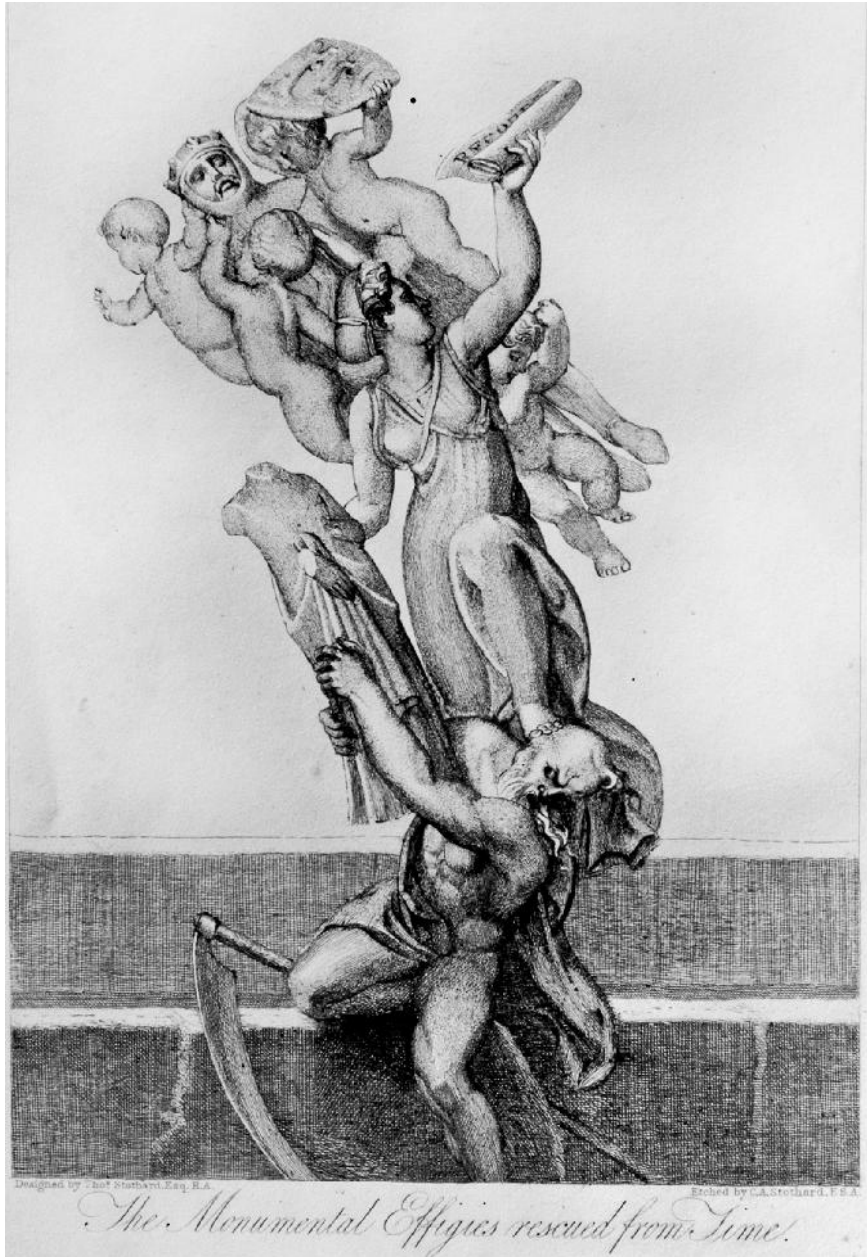


Figure 18. Etching by Charles Stothard after a drawing by his father, Thomas Stothard, of "The Monumental Effigies Rescued from Time," frontispiece to *Monumental Effigies*.

realized. Although it has been generally assumed that Stothard deliberately omitted the architectural environment of the effigial sculpture he represented, the evidence presented here proves, on the contrary, that he always planned to include etchings of the effigies' architectural contexts.⁷⁶ At first he intended to intersperse etchings of funerary architecture – two, three or more to a plate – among those of the effigies. Later, after years of thought, he rejected this plan, in favor of integrating the etchings of the monuments' architecture and heraldry into his work's textual descriptions, so as to enrich the whole book and unify its aesthetic architectonically. So, although it is true that the book as published in 1832 only included a few architectural etchings, located on a handful of text pages, the virtual absence of the architecture of medieval tomb monuments from the *Monumental Effigies* should not be ascribed to Charles Stothard's religious, nationalistic, historical, or other ideological motives. Instead, it was simply an unfortunate consequence of his tragically early and unexpected death. It was the result of accident, not of intention.

Finally, Stothard's claims for the visual accuracy of his etchings should be situated within the re-evaluation of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century antiquarianism that is currently taking place.⁷⁷ Stothard argued that the fidelity of his depictions of medieval funerary monuments would rescue them from "the destroyer Time" (Fig. 18); that his etchings would elucidate the "History and Biography" of those represented; and that they would supply reliable models for history painters.⁷⁸ There was nothing particularly novel in any of these ambitions. In the previous century, Richard Gough had fully grasped the importance of visual accuracy, of "truth to the object," and had striven for it in his *Sepulchral Monuments*, by employing some highly accomplished draughtsmen, John Carter and Jacob Schnebbelie, for example, both of whom produced important works independently as well as working for him.⁷⁹ Stothard's great advantage over Gough was that he himself possessed the artistic skills and training to transmit his first-hand knowledge of every effigy, gained from drawing it on site, into prints that he himself etched. In those cases where details or the whole effigies were painted, Stothard assiduously supervised his colorists, who worked from his watercolors. Stothard's

⁷⁶ Knowles, "French excursions," 66, must be exempted from this criticism.

⁷⁷ E.g., *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700–1850*, ed. M. Myrone and L. Peltz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); *Tracing Architecture*, ed. Arnold and Bending (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); R. Sweet, *Antiquaries: the Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Hambledon, 2004); and the exhibition catalogue *Making History*, ed. Gaimster et al.

⁷⁸ These ambitions are outlined on the reverse of the folders in which the etchings were issued.

⁷⁹ See above, note 6. For the artists supplying Gough, see also Badham, "Gough," 36–37.

prints attained levels of excellence that were only slightly compromised when his widow had to employ other artists to produce etchings after his drawings.⁸⁰ Stothard advanced beyond what Carter and Schnebbelie were able consistently to achieve, for several reasons: his superior artistic training; his access to their work as a model to surpass; but also because he had the guidance of Thomas Kerrich (1748–1828), a highly skilled amateur etcher with a profound knowledge of medieval sculpture and armor, who gave him a great deal of valuable technical advice about etching and about his subject matter.⁸¹ Additionally, the fact that Stothard was simultaneously historian, antiquary, and historicist artist, and that his father was a nationally important artist, helped to give him a status in the Society of Antiquaries that neither Carter nor Schnebbelie had enjoyed. Stothard also benefited from, and in turn influenced, a wider cultural shift, in which British medieval history and its pictorial representation, were attaining a new significance, as Britain's political, military, and economic power expanded.

No artist, however, is a neutral transcriber of what he sees. Depiction is always a form of translation and of interpretation. There is perhaps a certain irony in the fact that the same drive for visual accuracy that motivated Stothard would lead to the privileging of the ostensibly objective photograph over the apparently subjective artistic depiction.⁸² This drive towards objectivity of representation was, of course, itself part of a much larger epistemological shift in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸³ Today, Stothard's prints of medieval effigies are still appreciated for their knowledgeable selectivity, and for their recording of details which have since been destroyed, but they cannot be regarded as wholly objective depictions of medieval effigies. Stothard's drawings and prints are themselves temporally located, just as we ourselves are. His prints are simultaneously accurate representations of medieval funerary sculptures and brasses as they appeared in the early nineteenth century, and, at the same time, supremely elegant Regency works of art.

⁸⁰ See Lindley, "Artistic Practice," for discussion.

⁸¹ See P. Tudor-Craig's entry in *ODNB*, s.n.

⁸² See *Art and the Early Photographic Album*, ed. S. Bann (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011), especially his essay "The Photographic Album as a Cultural Accumulator," 9–29.

⁸³ See L. Daston and P. Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone, 2007).

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Ethics in post-medieval responses to the Middle Ages form the main focus of this volume. The six opening essays tackle such issues as the legitimacy of reinventing medieval customs and ideas, at what point the production and enjoyment of caricaturizing the Middle Ages become inappropriate, how medievalists treat disadvantaged communities, and the tension between political action and ethics in medievalism. The eight subsequent articles then build on this foundation as they concentrate on capitalist motives for melding superficially incompatible narratives in medievalist video games, Dan Brown's use of Dante's *Inferno* to promote a positivist, transhumanist agenda, disjunctures from medieval literature to medievalist film in portrayals of human sacrifice, the influence of *Beowulf* on horror films and vice versa, portrayals of war in *Beowulf* films, socialism in William Morris's translation of *Beowulf*, bias in Charles Alfred Stothard's *Monumental Effigies of Great Britain*, and a medieval source for death in the Harry Potter novels. The volume as a whole invites and informs a much larger discussion on such vital issues as the ethical choices medievalists make, the implications of those choices for their makers, and the impact of those choices on the world around us.

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 D.S. BREWER

an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge IP12 3DF (GB) and
668 Mt Hope Ave, Rochester NY14620-2731 (US)
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISBN 978-1-84384-376-4



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